



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 146 • NUMBER 248 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, May 7, 2013



Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

CONTENTS

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

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, May 7, 2013

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

* * *

NAVIGABLE WATERS PROTECTION ACT

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-506, an act to amend the Navigable Waters Protection Act (Don River).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am proud to introduce this bill to restore protection of the Don River in Toronto, running as it does from the Port Lands in Toronto—Danforth all the way to the Don's source, 28 kilometres north in the Oak Ridges Moraine. This bill, which is seconded by my colleagues from Toronto from Beaches—East York, Trinity—Spadina and Davenport, is part of the NDP's effort to urge the Conservatives to reverse reckless changes to the Navigable Waters Protection Act in their last budget and to restore protection of Canada's lakes and rivers.

The historic Don and the Don Valley through which it flows are iconic symbols of Toronto and are valued parts of our community history and environmental culture. Over the years, the rejuvenation of the Don River has been a stellar example of community-building and of the dedication of hundreds of volunteers and community organizations conscious of our need for green spaces and a healthy environment.

The bill would seek to continue to protect and enhance the Don's natural heritage for the city of Toronto.

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

EXPANSION AND CONSERVATION OF CANADA'S NATIONAL PARKS ACT

Hon. Peter MacKay (for the Minister of the Environment) moved that Bill S-15, an act to amend the Canada National Parks Act and the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Resources Accord Implementation Act and to make consequential amendments to the Canada Shipping Act, 2001, be read the first time.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)

* * *

PETITIONS

GENETICALLY MODIFIED ALFALFA

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition regarding genetically modified alfalfa. It is signed by constituents in my riding and the surrounding area.

NUCLEAR FUEL PROCESSING LICENCE

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today.

Several months ago, the people in my riding of Davenport in Toronto awoke to the fact that for 50 years now, GE Hitachi has been operating a nuclear fuel processing facility right in the middle of the riding, right in the middle of one of the most densely populated parts of the country. Its operating licence states that it is to engage the public in a public information program, which it clearly has not done, and in fact has not done for 50 years.

The petitioners are asking the government to reopen the licence so that the people in my riding and in the city can have their due course of public engagement on this issue.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition I present today comes from members of my riding who are very concerned, if not angry, over the fact that many people are being charged money, \$2.00 and more, just to get their paper bills in the mail.

The petitioners call for the government to take measures to stop this practice.

SEX SELECTION

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present.

Government Orders

The first petition is signed by Canadians who recognize that CBC revealed some time ago that gender selection pregnancy termination is happening in Canada.

The petitioners point out that 92% of Canadians oppose this gender selection abortion and that all parties in the House condemned this practice.

The petitioners call upon the House of Commons, as a House, to condemn it so the world can see that we simply do not accept that here in Canada.

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is signed by petitioners who point out that Canada's definition of a human being is 400 years old.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to take into account the science of the last 400 years to redefine when life starts.

GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from numerous people in my riding and beyond. The petitioners are calling attention to the issue of genetically modified organisms. They are calling on the government to conduct an independent inquiry on the safety of genetically modified organisms and to provide clear evidence that genetically modified organisms in food are not a risk to humans or the environment.

[Translation]

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by residents of Prévost who are opposed to Vidéotron erecting a telecommunication tower in their community. They feel as though the rights of residents and people in neighbouring communities were not respected.

CANADA POST

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions to table. The first, which is signed by hundreds of Gatineau residents, pertains to the potential closure of the post office located at 139 Racine Street in Gatineau. These people are opposed to the closure of their post office, which is the only post office in the riding of Gatineau.

●(1010)

TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is in support of Bill C-452, which seeks to combat trafficking in persons and sexual exploitation.

HEALTH

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the third petition can be found on my website. I am not surprised, because health is a priority for Gatineau residents. They are calling on the Government of Canada to fully co-operate with the provinces and territories to negotiate a new health accord by 2014. This is extremely important to the people of Gatineau.

[English]

LYME DISEASE

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

The first is from residents of Winnipeg supporting my private member's bill, Bill C-442, calling for a national Lyme disease strategy. It is particularly timely, as this Saturday, May 11, is World Lyme Disease Day.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from residents of the Vancouver area who are calling on the government and this House to support a permanent, legislated moratorium on supertanker traffic on the coast of British Columbia.

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present two petitions.

The first is about the sad fact that last year 22-year-old Kassandra Kaulius was killed by a drunk driver. A group of people, Families for Justice, who have also lost loved ones to impaired drivers want to see tougher laws and the implementation of a new mandatory minimum sentencing for those persons convicted of impaired driving causing death. They also want to see the Criminal Code changed to redefine the offence of impaired driving to be vehicular manslaughter.

SEX SELECTION

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is regarding sex-selective pregnancy termination. The petitioners highlight that there are over 200 million missing women and girls in the world right now because of the gendercide. They are asking Parliament to condemn this practice.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN 2013 ACT, NO. 1

The House resumed from May 6 consideration of the motion that Bill C-60, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 21, 2013 and other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Government Orders

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, let us speak of kings and queens and crowns.

At the culmination of the Glorious Revolution in 1689, the British Parliament allowed William III and Mary II to ascend to the throne, but there was a catch: they would need to accept the convention of the right and the Bill of Rights, which established Parliament as the ruling power of Britain. It would become the mother of all parliaments, including our own.

While an imperfect document, some of the principles of the Bill of Rights live on to this day. One of them would later be described as no taxation without representation or, in the words of the Bill of Rights itself, that “levying money for or to the use of the Crown... without grant of Parliament...is illegal”. Simply put, the Crown can only spend the people's money with their consent, and only Parliament can grant that consent.

Three hundred and twenty-four years later, the principle is the same. Government cannot spend what Parliament has not approved, which brings us to the Crown, or crown corporations.

Under present rules, they may enter into a room with a union leader, negotiate an agreement and send the bill to taxpayers, who do not have a say but must pay. The people's servants in Parliament do not vote on it, nor does the elected government sign off, so in this respect it is as though we have returned to the mid-17th century, when the Crown levied money without grant of Parliament.

What has resulted? Let us consider Canada Post. Its losses and liabilities are the burden of its owners. They are taxpayers. Seventy-one per cent of the company's costs are labour wages and benefits. To find out why, let us look at the latest collective agreement, a 500-page monstrosity. For example, if there is no work for a Canada Post employee to do within a 40-kilometre radius of where he or she is located, the union agreement prevents that person from transferring to another place where his or her skills are needed. The worker must stay at home and remain without work even while on salary. In other words, when there is nothing to do, taxpayers pay for nothing to be done.

The union requires taxpayers to fund almost 500 corporate post offices, even though they are three times as expensive as retail outlets that provide the same service and are open for longer hours. After bankable sick days, pre-retirement leave, seven weeks of vacation and more, the amount of time the carriers spend delivering mail is only a portion of the time for which they are paid to do so.

None of this done, by the way, in the workers' interests; their jobs, after all, are only secure when the company is successful. What is more, ambitious, talented employees are forbidden from any kind of bonus, performance or otherwise, by their union. God forbid that excellence be rewarded.

The financial results speak for themselves. Last month's Conference Board report on Canada Post indicated “annual operating deficits of close to \$1 billion by 2020”.

On top of that, the company will have billions more in accumulated pension liabilities. Who will pay for that? It will be

taxpayers, of course. They never authorized it and they cannot hold to account the unelected officials who did. Politicians can claim innocence, for it was an arm's-length body that did it. Sure, the arms had enough length to reach into the pockets of taxpayers, but never mind; these crown corporations are independent. Actually, they are dependent on the same taxpayers they are independent from. In fact, we are told their very independence depends on their right to be dependent on the people they are independent from. Simply put, they are independently dependent.

●(1015)

I suppose it depends on one's point of view. In the view of opposition parties, today's crown corporations are similar to the crown on King James II's head. He was the last king of England prior to the Bill of Rights. He could tax as he wished and spend as he liked. He too was independently dependent.

However, every crown has its king. Union leaders have coronated themselves the monarchs of Canada's state-owned corporations. They have legislated monopolies on the workforce. Do as they say, or they will shut the place down with a strike. They collect mandatory union dues from workers, even those who choose not to be members—talk about taxation without representation. Employees who do want to work and build a merit-driven company are out of luck. They are banned from representing themselves in negotiations or from signing their own employment agreements. These vast union powers would make James II blush with envy.

While the budget will not solve all of these problems, division 17 of part 3 of the bill amends the Financial Administration Act to empower the democratically elected government to reject labour agreements that abuse taxpayers. In other words, we are restoring the principle of no taxation without representation.

We here in this chamber are that representation. The colour of this chamber is green, because in the early day of the House of commons, the commons came from the fields, and it was their toil in those fields that paid the levies the Crown expended.

It is the duty, therefore, of the government to have the approval of Parliament for all that it spends. This bill does precisely that. In this sense, it restores Parliament as defender of the public purse and makes the Crown servant and not master.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the Conservative member's shameful speech.

Government Orders

It is appropriate that he should speak about King James II, since, if hon. members listen carefully to what he is saying, they will realize that the Conservative member wants to take us back to the Middle Ages, a time when workers were overburdened by their employers, employers disbanded labour organizations, and workers had to work 14 hours a day in poor working conditions and did not have any rights. We get the impression from his anti-union attacks that the hon. member wants to take us back to 19th century England, as though that era is a model on which we should base the Canada of today.

The government is telling us that it has nothing to do with the closure of post offices because Canada Post is an independent corporation. However, as the hon. member for Gatineau pointed out today, if these corporations are independent, then why does the government want to stick its nose into their collective agreement negotiations and the rights of their workers? Why is the government acting in the best interest of employers rather than workers?

• (1020)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, in actual fact, it is members of the NDP who want to take our country back to the Middle Ages. They are the ones who want to take away the rights that Canadians and all members of parliamentary democracies fought for so that the people would have the right to decide how their money is spent. The New Democrats are the ones who want to take this power away from Parliament and the people that parliamentarians represent here.

[*English*]

It is they who want to take us back to the Middle Ages by removing the basic principle of no taxation without representation. It is they who want to take away workers' rights by denying them the ability to know how their union dues are spent or to make their own individual decisions.

We on this side of the House respect the principles of parliamentary supremacy, and we respect the taxpayers who pay the bills. Therein lies the difference.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are many examples of the Conservative majority government's lack of respect for democracy and parliamentary process. Canadians believe that there is a hidden Conservative-Reform agenda. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and Canada Post are national institutions Canadians believe in. There are government members with hidden agendas who want to attack our Canadian national institutions.

Why does the Conservative government attack our fine Canadian institutions?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, our agenda has been out in the open since we have been in government, since 2006, and the Canadian people keep electing us with increasing mandates. I note that, correspondingly, the party in the corner has been consistently reduced by the Canadian people as our and their agendas have become known by the population.

As for the issue of arm's-length independence, we on this side of the House believe that the Crown, or in this case the crowns, can only spend monies that are approved by the people's representatives here in Parliament. The other side believes that union bosses should

be able to decide how tax dollars are spent, without the approval of Parliament. My point in referring to the original Bill of Rights was to underline the fact that the approach the opposition is proposing is a violation of a sacred tenet of parliamentary democracy, one we have respected and one this budget restores.

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative member began his speech with talk of kings, queens and crowns. My speech will focus on mere mortals—ordinary Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and Canadians—the people the Conservatives have forgotten.

I had a public meeting in my riding of St. John's South—Mount Pearl just this past Sunday. At the start of the meeting, a 65-year-old woman approached me. She pulled me aside to speak privately about a problem. She is a single woman who rents an apartment, and the company that owns the apartment just raised her rent by \$45 every two weeks. That is \$90 a month. That is \$1,080 a year. The problem is that she is retired and has a small pension, a fixed income, and she has no idea how to pay for the increase in her rent.

What is in the bill, the economic action plan 2013 act, this economic inaction plan 2013 act, for that senior in my riding? There is nothing. There is no help whatsoever.

The lady asked me not to forget her. She asked me to do something about housing and to do something for seniors, for people on fixed incomes and for low-income earners. They are having a harder and harder time getting by. I am doing that right now. I will do it at every opportunity and every chance I get to speak about the Conservative economic inaction plan, 2013.

What is in this budget for low-income earners to help keep a roof over their heads? Nothing. The Conservatives voted down a recent New Democratic bill for a national housing strategy to fix Canada's housing crisis. What does the government do? What does their budget do? The Conservatives went a step further than just voting down the NDP plan for a housing strategy. Starting next year, they will cut homelessness funding by \$15 million a year. This budget does nothing for that senior in my riding, and seniors are suffering.

There was a story in the news back home in the last few days about an 82-year-old man from the Cornerbrook area of western Newfoundland. He was charged with theft for stealing food from a grocery store. The police say that this type of incident is rare, but a seniors' advocate says that this is only the beginning. The advocate I mentioned said in the news story that "more seniors will start to resort to petty crime, as many cannot afford to eat by the Canada Food Guide".

Eat by Canada's Food Guide? They cannot afford to pay rent. They cannot afford to turn on the heat in their own homes. That is what this country has come to. That is what the Conservatives have done to our country.

Government Orders

What does this budget do for Newfoundland and Labrador? Of all the things in this budget, what resonates most back home? What have people been talking about? They are talking about how the price of hospital parking is going to increase, about how the poor and the sick, the most vulnerable in our society, will have to feed even more money they do not have into parking meters.

The Conservatives can cut taxes to big business. They can give industry breaks, but who pays? It is the sick and the poor. That is who pays under the Conservative government.

What is in this budget for Labrador specifically? It is the status quo, more of the same: dirt roads, poor Internet service. Who knows what goes on behind the scenes? When Peter Penashue was our representative in the federal cabinet, he pitted The Big Land against the island. Penashue actually boasted about his divisive politics, which is the worst kind of politics.

● (1025)

Penashue admitted to holding up infrastructure projects on the island in an attempt to move forward projects in Labrador. This is the type of politicking that goes on behind the scenes with the Conservatives, but they are also in our faces with it. This is the third omnibus bill. It includes 49 pieces of legislation from increased user fees for hospital parking to cuts to health care and damaging cuts to credit unions.

Most Canadians will not realize the ramifications of this budget because it is so big with 49 pieces of legislation and because there is so little time to debate it. It denies MPs the ability to thoroughly study the bill and its implications. New Democrats would like to send so much of this omnibus bill to various House of Commons committees so we can bring in experts and analyze the true implications. However, the Conservatives deny us that opportunity and that right because they do not want the scrutiny. They do not want Canadians to know what is happening to Canada.

The Conservatives are trying to tell Canadians that there is nothing to see in this bill. In a way that is true. There is nothing for job creation, to make life more affordable or to strengthen the services that families rely on. There is little in this budget for youth. Youth unemployment stands at more than 14%. Although the Conservatives have just announced another 5,000 paid internships in this budget, that is a drop in the bucket compared to the need. We do not hear the Conservatives speaking about the \$14,000 a year those internships will pay. That is not enough for students to pay their student loans or participate in the economy. It is not enough to live on.

There is not a word in the budget about student debt. The average student debt in this country stands at \$28,000 per student. How can students participate in the economy the Conservatives like to trumpet as their success, when they begin their working lives with no work and a \$28,000 anchor around their necks?

Let us move on to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. I worked for almost twenty years as a journalist, twelve years as a daily newspaper reporter, five years as an editor-in-chief, a columnist, and another two years as an open-line radio host. Most of those years were with private media outlets. I personally know the kinds of pressures that can be exerted on newspapers or news outlets

to run or not to run a story. There are incredible pressures from advertisers, government and industry. That is why the CBC is so important. I see it as the jewel in Canada's democratic crown.

The Globe and Mail says that the Conservative government:

is taking a harder line on collective bargaining, giving itself sweeping new powers to steer independent Crown corporations in their negotiations with employees over wages and benefits. The main targets are the CBC, Canada Post and VIA Rail...Further, the bill gives the government the power to have a Treasury Board official sit in on collective bargaining negotiations at Crown corporations.

The union representing employees at the CBC warns that the new powers are a "ridiculous" infringement on the independence of the CBC.

I agree with that statement.

I will quote from Marc-Philippe Laurin, who is the CBC branch president of the Canadian Media Guild, the union that represents most employees. He stated:

I don't know how anybody looking at that cannot see this as turning the public broadcaster into a state broadcaster.

Can members imagine the CBC being turned into a state broadcaster, a mouthpiece for the Conservative Party? Can members imagine a crown corporation changing the terms and conditions of employment for a non-union worker at any time?

● (1030)

Can members imagine a day in Canada when workers and pensions are under constant attack? Can members imagine a day in Canada when post-secondary graduates are crippled by debt, and government does not care? Can members imagine a day in Canada when a government would ignore a housing crisis? Can members imagine a day when an 82-year-old man is forced to steal food for his supper? That day has arrived under the Conservative government with this new Conservative inaction plan.

● (1035)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not think that the member has actually read the budget bill. That is the only conclusion I can come to.

He talked about affordable housing. This budget would make huge investments in affordable housing, including, frankly, a requirement for new affordable housing projects in which apprentices would be given an opportunity to work on that housing. This would mean that, in his own riding, the young people would be given an opportunity to learn the skills they need while they build affordable housing.

Government Orders

We have been proud to partner with Newfoundland and Labrador on a number of enormous projects. We have been proud to support seniors in the member's riding. However, what does the member stand and champion today? He champions more money for the CBC, while he points out that people in his own riding could use more support from the government.

Does this member understand that the resources of government are finite? If he does as he proposes and provides more to CBC while he taxes individuals and businesses more, he will be able to help the people of his riding less.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, I can tell the member what I do understand. I understand need. I understand when seniors and people on fixed incomes approach me and say that there is a housing crisis, the price of their rent is going up and they cannot afford it.

What this party on this side of the House proposed as a bill just a few months ago was a national housing strategy. That housing strategy would have brought together the three levels of government, federal, provincial and municipal, to come up with a strategy to tackle the housing crisis. How much would that bill have cost taxpayers? The answer is nothing. It would have come up with a plan to combat the housing crisis, but cost nothing.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for the concern he is expressing, particularly for the seniors in Newfoundland.

The member for Nepean—Carleton spoke here a few minutes ago about respect: his respect in this place and his respect for Canadians. However, I was troubled because that is the same member who voted repeatedly to shut down debate in this House, and shut down people's opportunity to learn about the various bills and legislation, more times than any other government in the history of our country or of this Parliament.

The member for Nepean—Carleton also talked about defending the public purse. I know my friend from Newfoundland has the same kind of concern about the public purse. I wonder if he has heard any indication at all as to where the missing \$3.1 billion from the public purse has gone.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, I do not have a clue where that \$3 billion has gone, but I think taxpayers have the same question. We all have the same question. However, the problem is that there is no answer.

The hon. member mentioned the speech from the member for Nepean—Carleton across the way. I have to say, when that member began his speech, and I mentioned this off the top of my speech, he spoke about kings and queens and crowns. I was sitting here listening, and thinking that it was a prime example of how the Conservative government is so out of touch with ordinary Canadians, with ordinary Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and with people on the east and west coasts. It is absolutely out of touch.

The hon. member just mentioned shutting down debate. What we are actually debating here is the third omnibus bill. Again, an omnibus bill is massive. This particular bill has 49 pieces of legislation.

Why would the Conservative government take 49 pieces of legislation and cram them into one omnibus bill? It is because it does

not want debate. The Conservatives do not really want to investigate or take a good look and they do not want Canadians to see what is really in this omnibus bill.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in my time today I would like to spotlight the really positive measures in economic action plan 2013.

Today's bill would ensure that Canada keeps a strong position relative to so many other countries in the world and avoids the mistakes of so many others around the world as well. It would do that by promoting jobs and growth, and supporting families and communities across the country, all while respecting taxpayer dollars. There are literally so many great and positive measures in the bill that I want to quickly run down the list for Canadians at home.

To build a strong economy and promote job growth, here are just a few of the great things in the bill: We are extending tax relief for new investments in machinery and equipment by Canadian manufacturers. We are indexing gas tax fund payments to better support job-creating infrastructure in municipalities across Canada. We are extending for one year the mineral exploration tax credit.

Our government is providing \$165 million in multi-year support for genomics research through Genome Canada. To help young entrepreneurs grow their firms, our Conservative government is providing \$18 million to the Canadian Youth Business Foundation. This government is also providing \$5 million to Indspire for post-secondary scholarships and bursaries for first nations and Inuit students, and there is so much more good news in the budget for Canadians.

To support families and communities we are also doing so many great things, and I want to explain how that transpires. Our Conservative government is promoting adoption by enhancing the adoption expense tax credit to better recognize the costs of adopting a child. We are introducing a new first-time donor super credit for first-time claimants of the charitable donations tax credit to encourage all young Canadians to donate to charity. To better meet the health care needs of Canadians, our government is expanding tax relief for home care services.

We are removing tariffs on imports of baby clothing and certain sports equipment. This will help families all across the nation. Our government is providing \$30 million in the 2013-14 budget to support the construction of new housing in Nunavut. We are investing \$20 million in the Nature Conservancy of Canada to continue to conserve ecologically sensitive land. We are providing \$3 million to the Pallium Foundation of Canada to support training and palliative care for front-line health care providers. As members know, we have an aging demographic in our country and this is extremely important.

Government Orders

Our government is committing \$3 million to the Canadian National Institute for the Blind to expand library services for the blind and partially sighted. I just met with some members from that community and they are so grateful for this \$3 million because it will enhance their quality of life. We are supporting veterans and their families by no longer deducting veterans' disability benefits when calculating other select benefits, and we are doing so much more.

I honestly have to ask NDP and Liberal members opposite: how can they possibly vote against these great items? How can they possibly vote against all these positive measures for Canadians? How can they oppose helping the blind get library services? How can they oppose supporting palliative care? How can they oppose helping out our veterans? Along with their constituents at home, I am waiting for the answer.

Unlike the opposition, our government understands that Canadian businesses big and small are faced with new economic challenges originating beyond our borders. That is why Canada's economic action plan would lower taxes, slash unnecessary red tape and improve conditions for new and growing businesses. The economic action plan 2013 act proposes the next wave of initiatives to preserve these gains and create high paying, value-added jobs for Canadians.

On the advice of the Canadian manufacturing industry, we are providing \$1.4 billion of tax relief to the manufacturing sector through a two-year extension of the temporary accelerated capital cost allowance for new investment in machinery and equipment. This tax relief would encourage manufacturers and processors to continue to invest in machinery and equipment, making their operations more productive and globally competitive.

● (1040)

While the NDP would have us give tax breaks to Chinese companies, extending the temporary capital cost allowance for machinery and equipment would help keep our jobs where they belong, right here in Canada. We know it works.

Listen to the Chemistry Industry Association of Canada, which told us:

Measures like the ACCA for new manufacturing machinery and equipment can make the difference between a company investing in Canada, or taking its business—and the stable, high-paying jobs that go along with it—elsewhere.

While manufacturing and exporting are at the heart of our economic action plan, improving our infrastructure is also crucial to delivering Canadian goods and services to markets as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible. Bill C-60 also proposes to index gas tax fund payments to better support job-creating infrastructure in municipalities across Canada. This is a very important component of our new 10-year building Canada plan, unveiled in budget 2013, which would fund infrastructure like roads and bridges from coast to coast.

The feedback from our municipal partners has been overwhelmingly positive. Just listen to the words of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, which told us that indexing the gas tax fund payments:

...recognizes that all types of municipal infrastructure can contribute to public safety, better quality of life and economic growth.

...An indexed Fund is essential so that infrastructure funding grows over time to meet inflation and the rising costs of construction.

Bill C-60 also proposes to reform the temporary foreign worker program to ensure that the cost of the labour market opinion process would no longer be absorbed by taxpayers, and to better ensure that Canadians would be given the first chance at available jobs. We plan to support job creators, such as junior mineral exploration companies, by extending for one year the 15% mineral exploration tax credit for flow-through share investors. We would also clarify the rules for how we would treat proposed investments in Canada by foreign state-owned enterprises and would allow for the extension of timelines for national security reviews by modernizing the Investment Canada Act.

While we remain squarely focused on jobs and growth, our government recognizes that Canadians are our country's greatest resource. As outlined earlier, we would be doing some very positive things for Canadian families in today's legislation. To help Canadians selflessly welcoming a child into their family, as I said earlier, we would adopt the adoption expense tax credit. To better help the health care needs of Canadians, we would expand tax relief for home care services. The Canadian Home Care Association said that this is:

...an important step in supporting the needs of our aging population and enabling individuals to live independently in their homes.

Through our new measures, designed to ensure everyone pays their fair share, Bill C-60 would help to keep taxes low for everyone, providing Canadian families with greater opportunities than ever before. Not only is our plan prudent; it is an effective response to global economic changes, which still persist. By staying the course, our Conservative government will continue to promote economic growth, job creation and long-term prosperity for all Canadians.

I urge all my colleagues on all sides of the House to vote in favour of Bill C-60. I outlined today all the wonderful things that are in the budget and that hit home very closely to Canadian families, to the aging population and to the municipalities, who so welcome the indexing of the gas tax. It is so important, so we can build the infrastructure within our country.

Today, I met with the electrical workers, and they are praising what we are doing in terms of the foreign workers, saying that jobs belong in Canada, and Canadians need those jobs.

Government Orders

●(1045)

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the member for Kildonan—St. Paul, referenced some of the money in the budget that would go to the CNIB. We welcome that. Unfortunately, there is little else in the budget for persons with disabilities. In fact, 50% of people with disabilities in our country are unemployed. That climbs to 80% when it is developmental disabilities. There is nothing to change that. There is no action by the government on ratifying the UN convention on persons with disabilities. It owes; it is 14 months late in giving a report card to the UN. There is still no indication of where that is.

On the gas tax, the member suggested that somehow this would be a big boon to municipalities. In fact, not one nickel of increase to the gas tax would flow until 2016 at the earliest, which is at least three years hence. Regarding the money that the Conservatives say is in the budget, there will be three more budgets before there would be any more money flowing in the gas tax indexing that they are crowing about.

●(1050)

Mrs. Joy Smith: Mr. Speaker, we hear daily from members across the way that the budget is no good, that nothing good is happening here in Canada. In actual fact we have seen, over every community, so many jobs created. We have heard people, like the those in the Association of Manitoba Municipalities in my province, say it makes a big difference because then municipalities know for 10 years that the funding would be coming and it would allow them to do the proper planning for the huge capital projects.

I hear members opposite saying these are not good moves. Obviously we are one of the countries across the globe that other countries look up to, because we have a stable economy, Canadians are working and we have focused on one major thing. Well, we have focused on a lot of things, but the major thing is to keep our economy stable. The major thing is to keep people working and to promote economic growth. This country is in a really good position. Families are working and living well because of the economic expertise of our Prime Minister. I thank him for that.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know there is a cabinet shuffle coming up, and if there is one thing the Prime Minister likes it is someone who can give a good message even when it is really a bad one. When we listen to the member for Kildonan—St. Paul, her remarks almost make this draconian budget, which is an attack on the middle class, look good. The Prime Minister certainly should consider her as a replacement.

The fact of the matter is that this budget would increase taxes on middle-class Canadians by close to \$2 billion every year. The Conservatives take \$550 million more every year from the profits of small business owners. She talked about that, but did not mention that figure. There is the recurring payroll tax hike of another \$600 million each year. She talked about some of the tariff cuts, which would reduce hockey equipment, yes, but she did not mention the tariff increases that would increase the costs for many Canadians, while not doing anything about enhancing the manufacturing base within Canada.

In her remarks, she does not mention the hidden measures that are an attack on the middle class in our country. It is easy to see why we will oppose the budget because—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I ask all members to keep their questions and responses short.

The hon. member for Kildonan—St. Paul has only 45 seconds.

Mrs. Joy Smith: Mr. Speaker, this is passing strange to hear, when I just explained how well economically placed our country is and how associations across the country are praising the government for the strong, stable economic environment it has placed in our country.

The main thing is that we should work together as parliamentarians. The budget obviously speaks to families in our communities. It speaks to our aging demographic. It speaks to people who need jobs. As members of Parliament in the House, partisan remarks should be left by the wayside, and we should all be working very closely to ensure that our country remains economically stable for all Canadians.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-60, a bill that is focused on what matters most to Canadians: jobs, growth and long-term prosperity.

Canada has experienced one of the best economic performances among the G7 countries, both during the global recession and throughout the recovery. Due to our strong economic policies, our global reputation is highly respected and admired by countries around the world. It has earned us, for the fifth year in a row, the reputation of the soundest banking system in the world from the World Economic Forum.

Bill C-60 would only enhance this strong record with decisive action in all areas that drive economic progress and prosperity. This includes connecting Canadians with available jobs, helping manufacturers and businesses succeed in the global economy, creating a new building Canada plan, investing in world-class research and innovation, and supporting families and communities.

Our government understands that, while we have a strong economic reputation, we need to remember that Canada is not immune to the instability of the global economy. We need strong leadership, and that is exactly what our government would provide with Bill C-60, as I will outline in my remaining time.

Government Orders

In my riding of Oxford, manufacturing is the source of employment for many residents and is one of the key engines of the Canadian economy. Since 2006, our government has supported the manufacturing industry by lowering business taxes to 15%, which allows manufacturers to keep more of their money to invest and hire more employees; investing \$110 million to double support to manufacturers and other entrepreneurs through the industrial research assistance program; eliminating the job-killing corporate tax; and much more.

With Bill C-60, we would provide even more support for new investments in machinery and equipment for the manufacturing and processing sector. This would be done by extending the accelerated capital cost allowance for two years, which would increase the support for manufacturers by almost \$1.4 billion. I know this support would benefit manufacturers in Oxford and across Canada.

Our government believes in keeping taxes low for all Canadians. Since 2006, we have cut taxes more than 150 times, reducing the overall tax burden to its lowest level in 50 years. That translates into a total savings of \$3,200 for a typical Canadian family of four.

We would build on these already astounding savings with even more tax relief for Canadians. In Bill C-60, we would eliminate consumer tariffs on babies' clothing, sporting goods and exercise equipment. In total, this would provide \$76 million in tariff relief for Canadians.

We would also introduce a temporary first-time donor's tax credit to encourage more Canadians, and those who had not donated recently, to give to charity. This would not only help a plethora of charities but also provide \$25 million in annual tax relief. The savings just keep getting better and better under our government.

Youth are the future, and that is why our government believes in providing young Canadians with the information and opportunities they need to make smart education and employment decisions. Our investments in youth since 2006 have included expanding the eligibility for Canada student loans through a reduction in the expected parental contribution; investing more than \$300 million per year through the youth employment strategy to help young Canadians get the skills and work experience they need to transition into the workplace; and reducing the in-study interest rate for part-time students to zero, saving them approximately \$5.6 million per year.

In Bill C-60, we would support Canadian youth even more by providing funding of \$18 million in multi-year support for the Canadian Youth Business Foundation. This foundation is a national not-for-profit organization that works with young entrepreneurs between the ages of 18 and 34 by helping them become the business leaders of tomorrow through mentorship, expert advice, learning resources and start-up financing. Over the past 10 years, the foundation has worked with 5,600 new entrepreneurs, helping to create 22,100 new jobs across Canadian communities.

Canadian farmers are the backbone of our country and represent an important industry in my riding of Oxford. For generations, our farmers have fed Canadians and the world while providing jobs and opportunities across Canada.

● (1055)

Our government has supported Canadian farmers with strong investments and programs since 2006. We have provided over \$7 billion to farmers through a new suite of business risk management programs, including AgriStability, AgriInsurance, AgriInvest and AgriRecovery; over \$2.3 billion toward Growing Forward 2, which invests in innovation, competitiveness and market development for Canada's agriculture sector; \$370 million to the hog industry; support for debt restructuring to help sustain the industry and much more. In Bill C-60, we would be supporting farmers across Canada.

We would provide \$165 million in multi-year support for genomics research through Genome Canada. This funding would enable Genome Canada to launch new large-scale research competitions over the next three years, would support continued participation by Canadian genomics researchers in national and international partnership initiatives, and would maintain Genome Canada's operations and the operations of the regional genome centres and science and technology innovation centres until the end of 2016-17.

We owe a lot of gratitude to our Canadian veterans who fought with bravery and courage for the freedom we enjoy today. We will always be indebted to them for the great sacrifices they made. Our government stands up for veterans, and that is why in Bill C-60 we are improving the war veterans allowance program. This program provides assistance to low-income veterans of the Second World War and the Korean War, as well as their survivors. Under the current program, a veteran's total calculated income includes a disability pension provided by Veterans Affairs Canada. This pension is automatically deducted from the amount of benefits available to veterans and survivors under the war veterans allowance. Amendments in Bill C-60 will no longer allow the government to take the disability pension into account when determining eligibility and in calculating benefits provided under the war veterans allowance. Under this government, veterans will be taken care of and will never be forgotten.

An investment in Canada's public infrastructure creates jobs and economic growth and provides a high quality of life for families in every city and community across the country. Canada's economic prosperity is supported by a network of highways and roads, waste water infrastructure, transit systems and recreation and cultural facilities. This network reaches into every community and touches every Canadian. In recognition of the importance of efficient prosperity and quality of life, our government has made significant investments since 2006 to build roads, bridges, subways, rail and much more.

Government Orders

In Bill C-60, we are continuing this support through the community improvement fund. This fund includes \$21.8 billion over 10 years through the gas tax fund payments. Currently at \$2 billion per year, we are proposing that these payments be indexed at 2% per year starting in 2014-15, with increases applied in \$100-million increments. The list of existing eligible investment categories would be expanded to include highways, local and regional airports, short-line rail, short-sea shipping, disaster mitigation, broadband and connectivity, brownfield redevelopment, culture, tourism, sports and recreation. The fund would also include \$10.4 billion over 10 years under the incremental GST rebate for municipalities to provide communities with additional resources for the maintenance and operation of existing public infrastructure and facilities.

Canada's gas tax fund would provide predictable and long-term funding for Canadian municipalities to help them build and revitalize their public infrastructure assets.

I am proud of the investments our government is making with Bill C-60. I and the residents of Oxford look forward to the speedy passage of Bill C-60, and I encourage all parliamentarians to seize this opportunity of unity in Parliament and give Canadians what they deserve, and in many cases, what they desperately need.

• (1100)

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments. However, he has not dealt with one of the biggest issues facing us, and that is the lack of democratic action on this bill. We are not permitted to discuss it in the House of Commons beyond the end of today, and we have been told that there will be only five days of debate in committee. With five days for 50 bills at two hours a day, that is about 10 minutes for each bill to be studied in committee.

I am wondering if the member would comment on the democratic deficit we seem to have encouraged, at this Conservative government's urging, by limiting debate on things he claims are very important, such as the increase in the gas tax. As I pointed out earlier, it will not take effect until there have been three more budgets, and those three more budgets will probably not be studied in any great detail, because the government is so fond of limiting debate.

• (1105)

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, what my colleague forgets is that this is going to a number of committees, and there will be debate at those committees, so it is not being limited.

The member went on about the municipalities and the money. I would remind him of what the Federation of Canadian Municipalities said about budget 2013:

Today's budget delivers significant gains for Canada's cities and communities. We applaud the government for choosing to continue moving our communities forward even as it meets its immediate fiscal challenges.... By maintaining and extending unprecedented investments in our cities' infrastructure, it will spur growth and job creation....

I do not know why the other side would not get behind this budget and get it passed in a hurry.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I could not help but comment on all the smoke-and-mirrors talk about what the future is going to be. I would hope that things were just as rosy as the

picture the government is painting, but the reality tells us that it is not the way previous commitments and suggestions have been.

On infrastructure, as far as what cities require, they had no way to say anything else, because if they had said anything else, FCM and the cities would have been muzzled, the same way our scientists, researchers and many anti-poverty groups have been muzzled. As far as what FCM said in response, what else would Conservatives expect them to say?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, I guess doing publications and papers and so on is muzzling. I would say to my hon. colleague across the floor that this is a good budget. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities knows the difference between this government and the former government.

Workers in this country know the difference. They know about the \$48-billion EI surplus taken out of their funds. Municipalities in Ontario and across the country remember the \$25 billion the Liberals took out of social transfers.

This is a good government. The municipalities in the Federation of Canadian Municipalities recognize this.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Oxford knows very well the importance of the auto industry, with Toyota in his riding and with the supporting parts sector growing as well. I wonder if the member would comment on both the renewal of the auto innovation fund and the advanced manufacturing fund. What could that mean across southern Ontario and for the Canadian economy?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, we not only have a Toyota plant in my riding, we have a General Motors CAMI plant in my riding.

Both of those funds are essential to the Canadian auto industry as we move forward. We compete around the world, but we also compete with our American neighbours. Keeping the Canadian auto industry strong is important to ridings, not just for the auto plants but for all the supplier industries across Ontario that supply these plants. Our government recognizes the importance of manufacturing, and certainly, my riding is a beneficiary of those things.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if we would just let loose a bit, we could really have quite an interesting debate on the budget in this House. We could really talk back and forth with one another about what we think should be in there versus all the fantasy comments being made.

It is a very convincing argument, if somebody on the other side is actually listening to it and believing it. Again, that is what governments do. I have been there. We stand up and promote our budgets and say that they are the best thing since sliced bread. We all do it. However, our job on this side at the moment is to ensure that we show its flaws.

Government Orders

I am happy to be standing here and speaking. This will be the 10th budget I have been asked to evaluate and vote on since I was elected to the House, so I have been around long enough to have seen them from all sides. In that time, I have seen both good and bad fiscal plans. Again, I have to say that I think budget 2013 is probably the most disappointing because of the federal fiscal strategy we are being asked to consider. It is not a strategy I think Canadians would really want us to support.

Let us have a bit of history. In 2006, the Conservative government came to power by making outlandish guarantees, and the Canadian public, or 39% of it anyway, bought those outlandish guarantees. In fact, the Conservatives promised to leave any notion of Conservative fiscal tendencies buried in a sea of red ink. At the time, the Prime Minister made the absurd commitment that he would somehow reduce taxes while also making radical spending increases, and we all know that this does not work. Of course, what did the Prime Minister do? He increased spending, a move that erased the \$14-billion surplus the Conservatives inherited from the Liberals when they came into power. What did they do with that? They immediately turned around and invested it. Some people would say that they used that \$14 billion of taxpayer money to buy the votes for the next election. Whatever happened, they got \$14 billion and spent it very quickly. I can only imagine that Brian Mulroney would have loved to have had something like \$14 billion to spend on all the things he wanted to try to achieve with a majority government.

Unfortunately, once the Prime Minister had recklessly spent the cupboard bare, he started increasing income taxes, payroll taxes. Then the Conservatives found new and creative ways to levy hefty fees and tariffs on everyday essentials, such as cancer wigs, household appliances, home heating oil and even blankets. Then, of course, what came? It was a severe rollback of vital income supports and social systems that low-income Canadians rely on each day for survival. The current government slashed support for seniors; attacked middle-class families; and advanced policies that all but slam the door on anyone who is sick, elderly, underemployed or generally working class.

However, this is not the first time Canada's finances have been run into the ground at the hands of the so-called Conservative Party. The last time a Conservative government actually balanced a federal budget in Canada was 101 years ago, in 1912. I know that the Conservatives would like to rewrite history, but they cannot erase everything. That is clearly in the history books. The last time any Conservative government ever balanced a budget was 101 years ago. When we hear all this wonderful pie-in-the-sky stuff, we have to keep that in mind. That Prime Minister was Robert Borden. He too inherited a surplus from a good Liberal predecessor, Sir Wilfrid Laurier. Just as the current government did, Borden managed to maintain it for only one year before dropping into deficit. It sounds as if our current Prime Minister is following the Borden example through excessive spending and reckless budgeting.

Between 2006 and 2008, the Conservatives put Canada back into the red, well before, not after, there was any recession. Well before, we were already in debt. Despite their rolling promises of restraint and prudence, they have not balanced the books since.

Now in budget 2013, the Conservatives promise that they will eliminate the deficit by 2015. Of course, they have made that promise before, and they just cannot seem to hit their targets. So far, the Conservatives have missed every target, but they expect us to believe that on the eve of the next federal election, somehow they are going to have fixed up the mess and will have balanced the budget.

● (1110)

I think a closer look at the financial plan would provide every reason for all of us as parliamentarians, and all of us as taxpayers, to be very suspicious of the pie-in-the-sky numbers that the Conservatives are talking about.

It has been said by my colleague from Wascana that the Conservative playbook contains seven simple tricks.

They inflate revenues by basing their fiscal planning on optimistic projections of economic growth. They ignore the reality, as they have before, that their numbers have never been correct. Time and time again their forecasts have been proven to be wrong, as both the IMF and the Bank of Canada have done once again in the past month.

They also create the illusion of financial flexibility. Conservatives have lowballed the reserves that should be in place to serve as fiscal shock absorbers against future economic setbacks. They have no contingency plan other than spending on the national credit card.

When a government department does not use all of its budget, the excess money lapses back to the treasury. The Conservatives are counting on very large lapses over the next several years. In other words, they are making big announcements, hoping that everything will go the way they want it to go.

While cracking down on those who do not pay their taxes is an absolute necessity, and for that we give them two points of credit, the Conservatives claim of a balanced budget depends heavily upon quickly collecting billions in unpaid taxes. That seems highly improbable, given that they are also chopping millions of dollars from the same agency that is supposed to be going after the cheaters.

For big programs like infrastructure, the government claims to be increasing investments. We talked about that a bit earlier. However, any increases are actually years away, and our cities and FCM know that. It is a trick called "back-end loading". In reality, the build Canada infrastructure budget has been slashed, not increased by \$1.5 billion, in each of the next two years.

Despite false claims to the contrary, the government is increasing taxes in dozens of nefarious ways, on everything from hospital parking fees to blankets. The two biggest types of Conservative tax hikes are higher tariffs on imported goods and higher employment insurance payroll taxes. Again, this would hurt our small businesses in Canada that we need to be promoting.

Government Orders

Then there is the one that they are forever planning: using all these tricks to concoct the false illusion of a balanced budget by 2015. The Conservatives will claim to have met their fiscal objective just before an election, and before proof to the contrary can become available we will be back into another election.

We all know that people struggle with their day-to-day expenses, from diapers to Kleenex, to formula and healthy food. The cost of raising a family is growing in Canada. We all know seniors who rely upon that monthly OAS/GIS cheque to keep their lights on and food on the table. This is in our rich Canada. We all know of someone who is desperately looking for work so they can keep their family in their home. These are the people who budget 2013 has forgotten: working-class Canadians who do not fit into the Conservative plan.

The Conservatives are trying to trick Canadians into thinking they have the experience necessary to champion the economy, but in reality they are little more than professional grifters with a billion-dollar publicly funded advertising budget that is constantly telling us how well we are doing with the economic action plan that is paid for by them. It might be time for the Prime Minister to admit that while there are solutions, he is not thinking of them.

The budget includes a bail-in regime that would allow banks to generate capital by dipping into the savings of their account holders. The budget increases taxes and tariffs on middle-income Canadians and businesses, and the budget abdicates federal responsibility for a range of important scientific, social and economic programs.

I think budget 2013 betrays the trust of Canadians and shows just how devoid of compassion and trust they are.

• (1115)

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I feel obliged after listening to this hon. member's speech to clarify a few inaccuracies.

First, at the tail end of her speech she talked about the bail-in clause that is in the budget. I would like anyone who is listening to this to totally disregard that statement. Obviously there is a misunderstanding. I would be happy to explain to the hon. member that there is no way on earth that the banks can touch the assets of Canadian depositors. I would think she knows that. There is \$100,000 that is guaranteed by the Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation. I would like to reassure Canadians that does not happen. The bail-in we are talking about would use our own contingency capital.

However, I would like to ask the hon. member if she feels she has a better understanding of economics than the top 15 economists who have continually agreed with our budget projections?

• (1120)

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, it is important to attempt to clarify what my hon. colleague means by the bail-in regime so that Canadians do not get concerned and pull out all of their money. There is a \$100,000 guarantee in protection and all of that, but I do think it is important because it is in the budget. He should make sure it is very clear to Canadians exactly what he means on that point so we do not have Canadians panicking.

I have to say that my hon. colleague, for whom I have the utmost respect, truly believes everything he writes and says, and his

ideology fits right into it. The issue is that we have had many economists say how wonderful every one of those budgets has been, and every one of them has failed to meet the point. The Conservatives have never met their budget. They project and project.

We can always find people who believe in our pie-in-the-sky dreams and hope it will go that way, but the reality is that the Conservatives have never met any of their targets yet.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague's assessment of the Conservatives' economic incompetence. The last time they eliminated the deficit was 100 years ago.

However, I do not think that the Liberals can brag about eliminating the deficit by raiding the employment insurance fund or reducing transfers and placing a heavier burden on the provinces.

In a federation, the provinces and their situation are part of achieving a zero deficit. I feel—as does the future NDP government, I hazard to say—that if the government transfers the entire debt load to the provinces, it has not achieved its goal.

I would like to give my colleague the opportunity to set the record straight. The Conservatives have failed, but if we look at the impact the Liberals' so-called zero deficit had on the real world, they have no right to boast.

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, when the Liberals were elected in 1993, we had an over \$42 billion deficit left to us by the Conservative government. We were at a point where we were being chastised by third world countries about what had happened to Canada. There was no choice but to take very hard, swift action to try to get Canada back into the zone where it was supposed to be.

Paul Martin and Jean Chrétien had the courage to make the kinds of cuts that had to be made to bring everything into line, and for two or three years everybody had to suffer a little bit. However, where were we 13 years later? We ended up with a \$14 billion surplus, investments going into health care, a 10-year health accord, Kyoto, the Kelowna agreement, all kinds of things moving our country forward in the way it was supposed to.

That was a tough decision to make, but the Liberals clearly had the foresight and the courage to do that. I really question the kind of budgeting there would have been if we would have had the NDP in charge at that time.

Government Orders

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, sometimes when I hear my Liberal colleagues give a speech in the House about their record from 20 years ago, it almost reminds me of some of the dinners we have attended for former sport athletes who are well passed their prime, talking about the good old days. However, the good old days are a long way away.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Some want them back.

Mr. Ben Lobb: I do not think so.

When we focus on what we have gone through in the global economic downturn and we look at how we have come through it, there is a lot to be proud of in what this government has been able to do. Now the rest of the world is looking at Canada as the example of how to make it through and continue to provide a balance between keeping an eye on the bottom line while being able to make strategic investments to help grow our economy.

Since July 2009, we have seen the Canadian economy add over 900,000 jobs. Our employment levels are nearly back to where they were in pre-recession levels. The typical Canadian household now pays more than \$3,000 less in tax each year, and seniors pay more than \$2,000 less each year. We have reduced the GST from 7% to 5% and harmonized. It has made a big difference, especially in the province of Ontario, which I represent. We on this side have a lot to be proud of.

The opposition members have continued to criticize what we have done. However, time and time again we have proven them wrong. We continue to deliver for Canadians and the Canadian economy.

One point I would like to highlight with respect to Bill C-60, our budget implementation bill, is the gas tax fund. This has been an important mechanism for municipalities, and in my area, the counties, to continue to deliver on key infrastructure projects. We know that in 2009 our government doubled that from \$1 billion to \$2 billion, which was a huge investment commitment to our communities. Whether those projects are water, sewer, roads or bridges, it has provided the municipalities with long-term stable funding. It is ironic that at a time when Ontario is clawing back what it provides to rural municipalities, our government, in spite of a deficit and tough economic times, has continued to deliver that funding to our municipalities. With this BIA, we are expanding and indexing that. More importantly, we are expanding the number of areas that can be covered and where we are making investments for municipalities, such as economic development, shipping, whether through water, rail or airports, and broadband, to allow them to continue to develop and grow.

That is a key and important factor for economic development in the municipalities and counties in rural southwestern Ontario. Also, it is important to be able to apply some of that to economic development and tourism in the riding of Huron—Bruce, which from north to south along Lake Huron on the west side is known as Ontario's west coast. It is important that our municipalities can continue to deliver services to American tourists as well as those from the cities, so they can enjoy what we have and, more importantly, drive on safe roads and have safe reliable water and sewer services.

I will provide some information just to give members an idea of the scope and scale dollar-wise that we are able to deliver on.

When our government came into office in 2006, Bruce County received just a little over \$600,000 in funding; Huron County received \$582,000; and Central Huron, the municipality within which I live, received \$76,000.

In the 2011-12 budget year, the annual investment made by our government into Bruce County had more than tripled, to nearly \$2 million from \$600,000 just a few years ago. For Huron County it was \$1.8 million, and for Central Huron it was \$234,000.

• (1125)

The opposition likes to do a lot of talking and criticizing, but the fact is that those are real dollars going into our communities that are helping to make our roads better, our sewers operate at a higher efficiency and our drinking water clean. As we move forward, it would provide great opportunities for the topics I have mentioned in the past. These are all positives.

FCM is strongly behind us, as is the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, AMO. As well, if we look at the average age of our infrastructure, it is coming down from 17 years on average to 14 years. That is delivering.

I have not mentioned the massive commitments we made through the downturn, through RInC and accelerations through the building Canada fund, which helped to get projects on the go. In my riding where there is a huge number of contractors and so forth, it kept them at work and allowed them to make new investments in their machinery and keep people on. I think that really helped deliver, and it is something we can all be proud of, at least on this side of the House.

Another area we need to focus on, which some of my colleagues have touched on, is the commitment to the Last Post Fund. For people watching at home and members in opposition who are listening, I should mention that our government, in the face of recession and economic downturn, maintained our funding to veterans. We did not cut and run, we did not duck, but we maintained our investment and funding to our veterans. Members can go back just a few short years to see the investments we made with the new veterans charter. We completely enhanced it.

I can hear the member for Malpeque pecking away, and usually when the truth and the facts start coming out, his blood pressure starts to go up. He was there 20 years ago when the Liberals went in and slashed benefits to veterans, especially our Allied vets, the whole gamut. However I will try to stay focused on the Last Post Fund at this time.

Government Orders

We would double the amount we commit to veterans in need from \$3,600 to more than \$7,200 a year. This is important because those men and women served us well in World War II and in Korea; they put their lives on the line. When they came back from battle, some had ailments or impairments, which they likely lived with for their entire lives. However, through the hard knocks of life sometimes, maybe the finances did not come out as they would have hoped, which is why we are here for them today, so they can receive a funeral that represents their commitment and sacrifice to the country.

It is a shame, specifically when looking at this, that the opposition would not support this bill just on that alone. It would show the support, that this can be a non-partisan event and that we can all vote together on this BIA to show veterans from one coast to the other that we are all in it together with them on this.

The Last Post Fund runs this program in a highly efficient manner. Every dollar it receives goes toward the program and there is virtually nothing in it for administration. The fund does a great job, and I am very proud that we would be able to deliver and in a way that respects its work.

I previously worked in the manufacturing sector, and I wanted to touch upon the fact that our accelerated capital cost allowance would be renewed for two years at 50% from the previous 30%. Basically, this would allow businesses to make investments right off their machinery in three years instead of nine years, which is hugely important, especially in Ontario because of its manufacturing and industrial base.

I could do a 30-minute speech on all the investments we have made in manufacturing in Ontario and, Mr. Speaker, being from Windsor, you would certainly know of some of those investments that have benefited your region. However, I am sure members of the opposition have a question or two, maybe even the member for Malpeque, and I welcome them.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, is my colleague opposite aware that, on numerous occasions, we have asked to split this legislation to ensure, for example, that provisions affecting the Department of Canadian Heritage would be addressed separately? Does he not believe that it is better to have a public broadcaster as opposed to a state-controlled broadcaster?

[*English*]

Mr. Ben Lobb: Mr. Speaker, let me read a quote the member may be interested in. I know his province also has manufacturing. This is from Jayson Myers, the President and CEO of Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters. It goes on quite a way, but it talks to the last point that I made about the accelerated capital cost. He says, "It creates an incentive because manufacturers will lose these tax savings if they do not continue to invest". It all—

The Deputy Speaker: Point of order. The member for Huron—Bruce will have to take his chair for a moment.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher on a point of order.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Mr. Speaker, I wanted to make sure that the interpretation was working because he obviously did not understand a word of my question.

• (1135)

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order. Returning to the member for Huron—Bruce.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Mr. Speaker, he can flap his gums all he wants over on the other side, but what we are talking about here is what would deliver for Canadians. It would deliver for people in my riding. If he were to get on board, it might even help people in his riding.

We are talking about helping manufacturers. We are talking about getting people back to work. What is he talking about? We have put a billion dollars into the CBC. How much more do you want?

The Deputy Speaker: I would again direct all members to direct their questions and comments to the Chair, not to each other.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Charlottetown.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Huron—Bruce for his comments. I serve with the member on the veterans committee. He is indeed one of the hard-working members of the committee and someone who I think really does have the interests of veterans at heart. This is why some of his remarks with respect to the government's record on veterans are somewhat troubling. When he trumpets the fact that the government says it has maintained funding for veterans, he forgets that there have been more than 800 job cuts. He forgets that there has been a download of services to Service Canada at the very same time that it is making cuts; cuts of 46% in my province. He forgets about the comments that were made by the Auditor General, highly critical of the case management services provided by Veterans Affairs. I would add that my province is the only one that has no case managers. They were all taken out in the last budget.

However, I want to focus on the Last Post Fund. He trumpets the Last Post Fund. My question for the hon. member is this. There have been improvements made in the budget for the Last Post Fund, but two-thirds of all claims are rejected. Of those two-thirds that were rejected prior to these changes, how many of those two-thirds of veterans who were rejected would now receive help under the fund?

Mr. Ben Lobb: Mr. Speaker, the member asked about four or five questions, but one I would like to answer. He did make a point about the efficiencies that have been found within the department. It is not 1972 anymore. It is 2013. We can do things differently. We can do things more efficiently. As taxpayers, we expect that.

I choose to look at the fact that it is 2013 today. We can operate business differently. Up until a few years ago it was almost as if the highest technology Veterans Affairs had from the Liberal legacy was a typewriter. Therefore, we have made the investments. We have gone on our initiative to transform Veterans Affairs. I am proud of that. We are operating in a way that delivers funds to veterans, and they do not get spent on administration.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Bloc Québécois members to voice our views on the Conservatives' recent budget.

Although the federal government claimed it would negotiate pragmatic agreements with the Government of Quebec in good faith, instead it is directly attacking Quebec's unique approach with measures announced in budget 2013 and Bill C-60, the budget implementation bill.

I would like to ask the government what happened to negotiating in good faith. Where were the negotiations on the labour program that will deprive Quebec of millions of dollars? Where were the negotiations on abolishing the tax credit for labour-sponsored funds? Where were the negotiations on higher taxes for the *Caisse des populaires Desjardins*, which will wipe out a portion of Quebec members' dividends? Where were the negotiations following the unanimous vote by the National Assembly to retain Quebec's jurisdiction over securities? Where were the negotiations after the National Assembly's unanimous vote to keep Quebec's approach to homelessness? Where were the negotiations following the unanimous vote by the National Assembly against changes to worker training? Where were negotiations following the unanimous vote by the National Assembly against changes to employment insurance? Where were negotiations when the federal government imposed, once again, the "Ottawa knows best" doctrine to the detriment of Quebec's organizations and Quebec's approach? Where were the negotiations with Quebec when the federal government decided to finance the Lower Churchill project? Where were the negotiations with Quebec following the recognition of the Quebec nation?

There are many eloquent examples of conflicts.

Let us talk about employment insurance. As hon. members will recall, previous budgets have chipped away at the very foundation of our social safety net: government services and the old age security program.

Budget implementation Bills C-38 and C-45 were also a direct attack on seasonal workers and the regional economy of some areas of Quebec.

To justify its employment insurance reform, which harshly penalizes the economy in regions like the Lower St. Lawrence and the Gaspé, the government claims that it is trying to connect unemployed workers to available jobs, but really, it is tearing up its labour market agreement with Quebec, which helps unemployed workers find jobs.

In the last couple of budgets, the federal government has been trying to centralize Canada's economic development at the expense of Quebec's land use strategies, the well-being of the people in the

Government Orders

regions and regional economic development. The federal government is trying to gradually strip us of our dignity and our pride in our distinct identity.

With last year's budget, it was clear that the Prime Minister was continuing to build his version of Canada based on his values and interests. He proved that there was no room for Quebec to develop within that model. This year's budget is simply more of the same.

Budget 2013 is a direct attack on the way Quebec does things. As for labour market issues, Ottawa will take away millions of dollars from Quebec that helped the unemployed find jobs.

In its place, the federal government is pushing a program that will force employers and the Quebec government to provide more money if they want the federal government to contribute. In order to hand out cheques with the maple leaf on them, the federal government is ready to axe initiatives that are working well.

Ottawa also wants to bring in a new formula whereby the federal government, the provinces and employers would put in up to \$5,000 each to train workers. Although worker training falls under provincial jurisdiction, the federal government is stubbornly forging ahead, to the detriment of our financial services industry. The Quebec Minister of Finance has also criticized this.

Now I would like to talk about labour-sponsored funds. The elimination of the labour-sponsored funds tax credit is another direct attack on Quebec and its workers.

In addition to impoverishing people who are trying to save for their retirement, the federal government is also going to deprive Quebec SMEs of a key economic lever. Labour-sponsored funds are an integral part of Quebec's economic organization, as demonstrated by the fact that \$312 million of the \$355 million Ottawa plans to take away from workers will be from Quebec.

● (1140)

The *Chantier de l'économie sociale* has strongly criticized the abolition of the federal tax credit for labour-sponsored venture capital corporations, such as the *Fonds de solidarité FTQ* and *Fondation CSN*. Quebeckers, including unionized workers, use these funds as savings vehicles and commit to helping develop Quebec businesses, such as social economy businesses.

Bill C-60 again includes provisions on securities, as mentioned in the latest budget. The federal government is extending the mandate of the Canadian Securities Transition Office and still insists on creating a Canada-wide securities commission, despite clear decisions from the Quebec Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court.

In response to the federal government's budget, the Government of Quebec said, "Allowing the federal government to insinuate itself in securities regulation, which is within Québec's exclusive jurisdiction, is out of the question."

We have long known that Canada's Minister of Finance dreams of getting his hands on Quebec securities. Even after he was turned down by the Quebec National Assembly and the Supreme Court of Canada, the minister has not concealed his intentions to interfere in Quebec's key financial sector.

Government Orders

I would like to talk about homelessness and how the government does not respect Quebec's way of doing things. In its latest budget, the federal government said it supports the housing first approach, which could threaten community-based, universal homelessness initiatives that currently respond to very real needs in Quebec.

According to the Réseau Solidarité itinérance du Québec, all of the support services for some 50,000 people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless are in jeopardy as a result of the federal government's new policy. The federal government's actions on homelessness are worrisome. In addition to reducing funding, Ottawa wants to impose its housing first approach, which will force Quebec to sacrifice its expertise and the programs tailored to its needs. The National Assembly unanimously denounced Ottawa's attitude and asked that the homelessness strategy be redesigned according to the existing model and in compliance with Quebec's policies.

The Bloc Québécois thinks that the federal government's approach is unacceptable. It could severely hamper the work that people have done over the years on this issue. It would disregard the expertise that has been developed over time to reach the people in need most effectively. This is a direct attack on Quebec's way of doing things.

I would now like to talk about health transfers and social programs. Budget 2013 is one step closer to a \$36 billion reduction in federal health transfers. It will have devastating consequences on Quebec's finances because it imposes new agreements for equalization, health transfers and social programs and withdraws money transferred to Quebec for worker training. This is essentially a slap in the face for Quebec. To achieve a zero deficit, the Conservatives, like the Liberals before them, are lobbying the deficit into Quebec's court. Budget 2013 ushers in fiscal imbalance once again.

For all these reasons, and many others, the Bloc Québécois will not support the next federal budget, a budget that is unfair to Quebec, takes aim at Quebec and takes away some of its fundamental powers.

• (1145)

[English]

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we in the NDP have considerable concerns about the budget implementation act. In particular, I would like to bring up the issue of the direct control that the government is now going to have over crown agencies that it often describes as third party or at arm's length to the government. It seems as though the arms are getting shorter with each passing month here in Ottawa.

I wonder if my colleague would speak to the concern that many of us have around the fact that the government has now, in a sense, placed itself in control over the agreements that the CBC and other agencies may make with their unionized and non-unionized employees.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-François Fortin: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

Basically, the government is trying to interfere in various ways in the internal policies of crown corporations. This is not the first time the government has done that; it has done so in the past. That is clear

once again today, and in other recent events. Among other things, the government wants to be involved in the CBC.

As members may recall, the CBC's new code of ethics, imposed by the federal government less than a year ago, may also be dangerous, since it infringes on journalistic freedom and integrity.

The government now wants to interfere in collective agreements, which is completely unacceptable. Crown corporations must remain at arm's length from the government to remain independent.

• (1150)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague across the way for his speech. Although we know that he does not support the government's budget, which is no surprise since he is part of the Bloc Québécois, there are measures in the budget that are good.

I would like to ask him about one of the points in the budget and how important it is to his municipality. Every time I go to the gas station and fill up my car or my truck, there is about a 10-cent excise tax. That 10 cents that the governments collect gets transferred back through the provinces to the municipalities.

The fuel tax rebate is a major thing for our municipalities, as we heard from the member for Huron—Bruce. It has tripled over the last number of years. Municipalities now know that they are going to be receiving that much.

What it also does is allow the municipalities to borrow, knowing that the money is coming. The budget would also implement a measure that would not only guarantee that it is going to happen but that it would be indexed, so that as inflation goes, municipalities know that the indexed amount will be there to help.

Could the member tell me how important that is to the municipalities in his constituency?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-François Fortin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his excellent question.

He is right. The government's infrastructure program is very helpful to municipalities. As a mayor in my former life, I was able to benefit from the program and passed that on to my municipality.

This program helps municipalities complete infrastructure work within a reasonable time frame. However, the problem is that the numbers announced in the last Conservative government budget were shared with municipalities in 2010. Now it has become a permanent program, but the new money that we would have liked to see added to the program is not there.

Unfortunately, there is no money for 2013. There is just \$203 million on top of the \$53 billion for 2014. There is only \$203 million for 2015. In fact, municipalities will have access to all of the money only after the 2015 election.

The government is being proactive, but the majority of the money will be available for use only after 2015.

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in the House again and to speak in support not only of the budget but also of Bill C-60, which is the budget implementation bill. It lays out the measures the Conservative government will bring forward in the economic action plan for 2013 and onward.

One of the reasons why I am pleased to stand and speak to the budget bill is the amount of work that we did in the riding of Crowfoot. Prior to the budget being given, we had meetings throughout the riding at Strathmore Town Hall and other town halls where constituents came together to say what they believed was important to have in the budget. I am going to talk a little more about how some of those ideas have been moved here and how our Minister of Finance and our government are implementing some of those ideas that come from back home and from many different constituencies across this country.

I believe, first of all, that this is a very positive blueprint, a very positive strategy as to how we believe the Canadian economy must be advanced and built. We would be strengthening the economy in a number of ways through this budget implementation bill.

First of all, we would be helping manufacturers to buy new equipment through tax relief. We would be helping small business create more jobs with the hiring credit. We would be helping our municipalities rebuild roads and bridges with record new support in infrastructure, and there is much more.

This budget builds on the work our Conservative government has been doing since forming government in 2006. We are working to create an economy that will build jobs. It is not that our government is going to create jobs; we are going to create an environment in which small and medium-sized businesses can create jobs and make certain that those families that now have jobs will be able to keep more of their money in their pockets.

Canada has been quite successful. We have over 900,000 net new jobs since the depths of this recession took place. More than 90% of those 900,000 jobs that have been created are full-time jobs, contrary to what many of the opposition members say when they say that these are the wrong kinds of jobs, part-time jobs, just not the right kinds of jobs. Some 80% of the jobs are in the private sector. This is not job creation through continuing to expand the size of government. The majority, 80%, are in the private sector.

Canada has a very good record as far as job creation goes. In fact, we have the best record of the seven most industrialized countries in the world, the G7. The International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development project that Canada's growth will be among the strongest in the G7 for a number of years going forward.

For the fifth straight year, the World Economic Forum has ranked Canada's banking system as the soundest in the world. Canada has the lowest overall tax rate on new business investment in the G7. Canada is one of the few countries that still has the Triple-A credit rating. Our combined national debt to gross domestic product ratio remains the lowest in the G7 by far. Why? It is because there is a plan and a strategy. The strategy in the past five years has been working, and the strategy moving forward is building on that and

will continue to work, although the opposition feels somewhat concerned because the statistics that are coming out are exactly what Canadians, including my constituents, want to hear.

The opposition members call for more spending—spend, spend, spend—and they have the tax increases to pay for their spending. I am not going to talk much about the \$20-billion or \$21-billion carbon tax they are discussing, but they have an idea on how government can be expanded, how government can get bigger, and they would love to see that happen.

One of the reasons I am pleased with this budget is that government expansion is not going to happen under this watch. Opposition members would expand government and add to the national debt. What happens to countries that take that route? What happens to countries that choose to go down that road?

• (1155)

Canadians do not have to just sit back and surmise what may happen. We can take a look at what did happen in Europe. Governments burdened their citizens with unmanageable annual budgetary deficits, massive accumulated debt, huge and paralyzing government bureaucracies. What about unemployment in some of those countries? Unemployment in the eurozone tops 12%. In some of the countries, it is much higher than 12%.

Our Conservative government understands that Canadians want us to continue to emphasize the importance of maintaining Canada's strong fiscal position, especially during current difficult global economic times. To be quite frank, that is one of the major reasons we were elected. One of the reasons we were elected to a majority government is they understood this Prime Minister is the Prime Minister Canadians want to see, especially at a time when the global economy is in turmoil. Canadians want that type of leadership. Canadians know that our Prime Minister and Minister of Finance have built a stellar reputation for Canada in the international marketplace. Canadians want a stable government, one that is capable of making decisions, sometimes swiftly, and implementing them.

For many years I have heard from my constituents in all corners of the riding of Crowfoot that I represent about the importance of balancing our books. My constituents want our federal government to operate without having to borrow money to pay for a deficit every year. My constituents are farmers, ranchers and small business operators. The gas and oil sector is major in my riding of Crowfoot, but we also have a tourism industry in Drumheller and the Canadian badlands that is somewhat seasonal.

All of the families in my riding, from smaller towns, villages and cities, are all very careful in how they operate, and they want to balance their budgets around their kitchen table. That is the type of discussion they have. How are we going to be able to pass this farm on to the next generation? How can we operate within a balanced budget?

Government Orders

Our government is on track to balance the budget. One of the things that made me very pleased in the last budget speech was when our Minister of Finance rose and said, "...before I proceed, I need to make one thing very clear. It is simply this. Our government is committed to balancing the budget in 2015." When he stood and said that, a burden was lifted off my shoulders, because that was the message that my constituents wanted to hear.

On page 12 of the budget there is a chart that says in 2012-13 there is a projected deficit of just over \$25 billion; in 2013-14 we will have a deficit of \$18.7 billion; in 2014-15 we will have a deficit of over \$6 billion; and by 2015 we will be at a surplus of almost \$1 billion. In the two years after the budgetary surplus, it is projected to grow by \$4 billion and then \$5 billion.

How are we projecting? We see the official opposition coming forward with these budgets with nothing costed, nothing planned out and nothing on paper. We have a very concise strategy that has worked in the past, is working now and will continue to work in the future.

From 2006-08, our government paid down approximately \$37 billion in debt. When the global recession hit, we made a deliberate decision to run temporary deficits to protect the Canadian economy, and that plan worked.

We have helped create over 900,000 net new jobs, and we are on track to come back to balanced budgets. At the same time, we are doing things. The deficit reduction action plan is recognizing that we want to quickly come to balanced budgets.

We have an ongoing effort to control government spending. We work continuously to eliminate wasteful and inefficient spending. In total, our government implemented measures that will reduce the deficit by over \$15 billion per year in 2014, 2015 and beyond.

Economic action plan 2013 announced saving measures that will total \$2 billion by 2015-16, such as examining departmental spending to make sure we are operating efficiently, reducing travel costs, modernizing the production and distribution of government publications, and standardizing government information technology to reduce costs. We are closing tax loopholes. We are improving compliance programs to reduce tax evasion.

● (1200)

These are some of the things that this book of 300-plus pages lays out for Canadians to hear and see. Again, it is a pleasure to speak to this budget, and we look forward to all support on this budget.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with fascination once again to the revisionist history that comes from the Conservative benches on what caused the global crisis. The Conservatives would purport that it was social programs in Europe that crushed the world economy when in fact it was the deregulation of the banking sector and irresponsible speculation in Ireland, Iceland and Goldman Sachs in the United States. That is the record. The fact that there was not clear regulation in place was what caused it. I find it disturbing that my colleague was attempting to claim that it was social programs in Europe that destroyed it. I see the continual attack on social programs in this country, which the current government is carrying out.

My hon. colleague talks about the fact that the Conservatives are good fiscal managers. We just had the Auditor General's report in which he said that the current government has no ability to account for \$3.1 billion in spending. When Jean Chrétien said he lost \$1 million and it was no big deal, the Reform backbenchers went crazy on it. They were jumping up and down in their seats. Now they cannot account for \$3.1 billion. There is no trust in this government among the Canadian public.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think do not I see a quorum.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. It would appear that there is quorum in the House.

The hon. member for Crowfoot, with a response.

● (1205)

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to see everyone rushing in to catch the tail end of this speech. I appreciate that.

I was just going back through my notes again. If I left the hon. member with the impression that I am saying that Europe and the social programs were the cause for this recession, that is not what I said. I said that it was the issues in Europe and certainly in the United States, the housing markets and the banking industry. In fact, I went on and spoke about the sound banking that we have in this country, and that goes back years to other governments as well that laid out certain regulations for our banking industry. I certainly do not want to leave the member with the impression that I in any way said that it was social programs in Europe. I did not say that in my speech.

However, I would like to speak on the other point that this member brought forward. The Auditor General was very clear. He went back 10 years on the books, looked and asked if this \$3 billion was from this file or that file. The Auditor General was clear that there was no money missing. It was out of the terrorism file, and going back to the former Liberal government of 2001 when all of a sudden we were thrown into quick responses on the terrorism file. Some things maybe were taken out of other departments. However, the Auditor General said that no money is missing.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week the government quietly tabled a report, and it was interesting where it stated that the government reduced the number of employees from 278,092 to 262,902 from March 31 to December 31 of last year. Of the more than 15,000 jobs that were eliminated, 8,000 were full-time indeterminate positions, a reduction of about 3%. The remaining roughly 7,000 positions that were eliminated were for students and casual, or term, employees, the report indicated. The document, an annual report by the Prime Minister on the public service, shows students and casual employees, often women and younger members of the workforce, took the biggest hit.

Government Orders

My question for the member is in regard to providing services to Canadians; that on the one hand, the government puts a high priority on this sort of targeting, and then on the other hand, the Prime Minister feels it is necessary to increase the number of politicians in the House of Commons—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please.

The hon. member for Crowfoot.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, I am quite pleased to see that the public service is being reduced in some way. As much as we can do will be done through attrition. That is, it will be done through retirements. Some of the student layoffs and some of those things that the member makes reference to, although I have not seen the report, very well could be in temporary types of jobs as the employees are between college and another initiative.

However, this budget would bring forward a Canadian job grant that would be remarkable for students. It would allow them to retain a skill where governments and businesses help with the funding. Students today are excited about this because the studies that they will be taking will prepare them for the market and for jobs. That is what they want above anything else.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to rise to speak against the budget before us, both on content and on process.

Here we go again. We have a massive budget bill, over 100 pages, impacting innumerable statutes and bills that need to be debated in this House.

My colleagues seem to find this funny. It is not about being able to read. I can assure them I have learned to read at a fairly fast pace and comprehend. It is about Canadians' rights to have the budget debated in this House for transparency and for discussion. It is about giving duly elected members of Parliament an opportunity to do their jobs as elected officials by providing debate and discussion, and asking questions. That is what is being denied once again in this House.

On content, the budget does very little, if anything, to grow jobs for Canadians. It does even less to protect the jobs that exist for Canadians. It does very little to address the major challenges facing everyday Canadian families as they struggle to make ends meet.

The Conservatives are trying to say that they can just rush through the bill, maybe because they really believe there is not much in the bill and they have a lot to hide. Maybe they are too scared to have Canadians look at the bill and know that there are no job creation measures, that there is nothing to make life more affordable and nothing to strengthen the services families rely on. Once again, the government is trying to avoid public scrutiny of the measures it is trying to ram through this House at breakneck speed.

I also want to take the opportunity today to talk a little about an area that really impacts on immigration, citizenship and multiculturalism.

First, the bill continues a pattern with which the government has made us all too familiar. It just keeps concentrating more and more power in the hands of the ministers so they do not have to come back into this House in a parliamentary democracy to have what they are trying to do examined in any way.

The government has made a complete mess of the temporary foreign worker program. We have seen it over and over again in the media, whether it is HD Mining in B.C.; the backlog of the live-in caregiver program, which the minister himself addressed and is facing major problems and needs major overhaul; or the temporary foreign worker program that is currently under scrutiny because of the outsourcing of jobs at RBC. Despite all of that media attention on it, what actions has the government really taken?

Canadians were doing jobs that workers were brought in to do, but Canadians were then asked, "By the way, before you leave, can you train these new workers?" Once again, Canadians are being denied Canadian jobs.

Over the last two weeks, several individuals have contacted my office to tell the same story. They were brought to Canada as skilled workers, only to lose their jobs once they acquired permanent residency, or were let go just before they qualified to apply for permanent residency, and therefore a new batch of temporary foreign workers could be brought in.

Over the last number of weeks we have heard again and again about staggering abuses. The accelerated labour market opinions, only ever meant for highly skilled workers, were used and abused in a way that once again shocked Canadians from coast to coast to coast. Intra-company transfers were an abuse of the system in a massive way. Where are the investigations for all of these and where are the fixes?

• (1210)

The government, by the way, has had an opportunity—no, several opportunities over several years—to fix the temporary foreign worker program. There was, again, an opportunity with this bill, but rather than actually fixing a program that is wrought with flaws, a program that desperately needs an entire overhaul to function and be administered properly, the Conservatives slap Band-Aids on the holes, but only once they are exposed.

Faulty LMOs are being doled out. It is not a problem for the government. It simply gives the minister the power to suspend or revoke work permits that have already been handed out, but only if they are caught and there is public oversight. Once again, this is being done at the same time that the government is cutting funding to CIC and, therefore, limiting the kind of oversight that can be done over these files, over the granting of LMOs and the granting of the permits that go along with them.

Government Orders

Rather than addressing the full scope of the problems with this program, the Conservatives' Band-Aid in this case is another ministerial override when work permits and labour market opinions that have already been approved by them—and this is post-approval, by the way—become political hot potatoes. It is all political expediency and a public relations exercise. This bill's improvements would not get to the heart of the mismanagement of the temporary foreign worker program under the Conservative government.

Next, this bill introduces privilege fees to be set out in regulations for employers that apply for work permits. The minister has announced that this fee would be in addition to the new fees announced in budget 2013 for servicing TFW applications. The intention of the new fee, apparently, is to act as a disincentive for unnecessary use of the program. Of course, given the government's record to date, there is no assurance that these fees would not be passed on to the temporary foreign workers themselves and there is no measure anywhere cited to ensure that they would not be.

The government is now trying to fix problems it created. The last time it tried to fix problems, it allowed employers to pay up to 15% less and, guess what, there was a massive denial of that in the House. Then, outside at a press conference, the minister said that program was gone. The ALMO, which was hastily implemented and then not administered, with very little oversight and abuse, was allowed to happen and has been suspended temporarily—and I would say it was allowed to happen because the ALMOs that were granted went way beyond the parameters that were set out for this particular program.

Once again, I want to say that we in the NDP are not opposed to a temporary foreign worker program that addresses the legitimate needs of skills shortages and acute labour shortages where no Canadians are available to do the work. That is what we stand for and yet, instead of protecting Canadian jobs and addressing the abuses that are happening, the government is once again looking for band-aid solutions.

Forgive my skepticism, but we learned only yesterday that the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development completely disregarded a briefing note that told her of almost 3,000 inappropriate uses of the TFW program almost a year ago. Just a few weeks ago ministers and parliamentary secretaries all feigned surprise and said they moved quickly as soon as they found out there was a problem. In the world I live in, over a year or year and a half of waiting does not indicate that they took action quickly.

This bill would also deny due process to refugees, and I want to mention that. There are all kinds of fees that the minister would no longer have to come to the House to put into place. New Democrats have major concerns about the lack of transparency of the usage of those fees.

• (1215)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague, who knows this file on the temporary foreign workers so well.

We have this myth with the Conservatives about the market: we will just let the market decide; it is basic economics, the law of supply and demand. That is until it does not quite work for their friends in the big industry. For example, if there is a labour shortage, wages rise and there is competition.

However, what we have seen with the temporary foreign worker program is that the Conservatives have allowed 500,000 temporary foreign workers to be brought in to actually drive down wages and make it more difficult to have a competitive labour market.

It is clearly unfair to Canadians, but it is also clearly unfair to the people who are being brought over and treated as disposable labour. They come over here, they are supposed to do the work and then they are shipped back. Canada is left in a deficit position both in terms of local people who are not being employed and in terms of immigrant families who could actually become part of Canada and buy houses and participate; they are being left out.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague why she thinks it is that the government has allowed this program to actually undermine social development in our country.

• (1220)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind everyone in the House, especially my colleagues across the way, that Canada has a very proud history of having immigration policies that are all about nation building. This particular program, the temporary foreign worker program, actually undermines our position in the world and makes Canadians very uncomfortable, because of the way it is being administered and because of the abuses that are being allowed.

If we have a legitimate need for ongoing workers, whether it is in Tim Hortons, in the meat-cutting plant in Alberta or on the east coast in the fisheries area, it is not temporary work. It is ongoing work, and if there are no Canadians available, that is where the immigration system needs to kick in.

However, the government has made a boondoggle out of this program. It is being used and abused to favour its corporate friends to increase their profits.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pick up on the temporary foreign worker program. It is a program that, in the past, has served our country exceptionally well. There are industries that have survived only because of having access to foreign workers.

It is important for us to recognize that, over the last couple of decades, we have seen great benefits to our nation as a direct result of the temporary foreign worker program.

Having said that, we do recognize that in the last couple of years, the government has really turned a blind eye to it. It has allowed the temporary foreign worker program to now exceed 330,000 foreign workers coming to Canada. Even during Canada's economic peak, we had roughly 160,000 foreign workers. There is an obvious imbalance.

Government Orders

My question to the member is what she, or the New Democratic Party, believes is the optimum number of temporary foreign workers that Canada should be looking at. That is if she can put it down in terms of numbers.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, this is not about a number. This is about a time when no Canadians are available for work, whether they are Canadian citizens or whether they have just arrived in Canada as permanent residents.

With all due respect, I would like to mention that it was under the Liberal government that the numbers started to increase in the temporary foreign worker program. Some of these lax grantings of LMOs started during that period and that has now accelerated.

I think that to ask for an arbitrary number is not to understand the fundamental reason why the program is in place and why it needs to exist. It only exists when we have genuine labour shortages, where Canadians are not available to do the work.

There is no number; it should just be in response to those vacancies.

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be participating in the debate today on the budget implementation bill.

The success of a nation is due to the manner in which society values its workers, its innovators and the way it allows everyone the opportunity to succeed and improve their lives through hard work and ingenuity. This is supported in a recent book, *Why Nations Fail*, by Daron Acemoglu from MIT and James Robinson of Harvard University.

Why Nations Fail provides a historical study of civilizations that have succeeded and failed and determines that civilizations have fallen or thrived based on, above all else, their political institutions. Governments thrived when they provided the rule of law, secure property rights and a strong independent judiciary. Good government prevents any elite from extracting the wealth out of a country for themselves and spreads opportunity around.

Geography, culture and resources, all gifts that Canada has in abundance, take a back seat to good government that is responsive and accountable to its citizens in this manner. When money can travel over wireless networks in a split second and investors from anywhere in the world can invest anywhere else in the world within a matter of minutes, people will invest in a nation that will secure their investments and grow them with minimal risk. The people of those nations benefit with jobs and opportunities, as Canadians do.

Canada's economic action plan for 2013 is part of an economic process. It is in its seventh year. It began in 2006, from our Minister of Finance and Prime Minister. It prioritizes stability, prudent fiscal management and careful stewardship of our economy, something that most of Europe and the U.S. are struggling toward.

How is Canada doing? Most Canadians know these facts. Canada has had the most stable and sound financial system in the world for five years straight. Canada is the number one place in the world to do business. Canada has the highest possible credit rating from the three major rating agencies. We are in the best fiscal position of any of the G7 countries. We have the lowest government net debt to GDP ratio

in the G7. During the recent recession Canada did not have to bail out a single bank. By 2015 we will have a balanced budget without putting our hands in the pockets of taxpayers and business owners for new taxes.

However, what some members of the House do not understand is that none of this happened by accident. This was achieved by good management and tough decisions. Let me give a few examples.

Back in 2006, when the U.S. government allowed risky mortgages that covered the entire value of the house, plus in some cases even the furniture, our government tightened up the mortgage rules, asking for higher credit ratings and stopping the 40-year terms the banks were pitching. This helped save Canada from a U.S.-style housing crisis. Despite our deficit, created to fight the 2008 recession, and the difficult task of limiting spending now to balance our national budget, just last year the NDP and Liberals wanted to send billions of our tax dollars to Europe to bail out governments that have not made the tough decisions we are making. We said, "No way".

We would never consider the NDP plan to grab \$60 billion out of the pockets of business owners, shareholders and workers, although personal debt is at an all-time high. Given the chance, that plan would include a death tax on the wealthy, promoted by the NDP academic branch at the Broadbent Institute. Of course, the definition of wealthy would be anyone who had perhaps \$50,000 a year after they die, which is about the cost of a parking space at a condo in downtown Toronto.

Democracy is sharing power. Sound economics and strong institutions support that sharing and ensure the security of all Canadians, not just the wealthy. That is why those who are not wealthy are often the first to support Conservative budgets. In bad times the wealthy do all right, but those who are not wealthy are at the risk of losing everything. They have the most to lose when governments overspend for decades and go bankrupt. They are the ones who line up at the EI office. A good budget must balance the interests of all citizens, while not confiscating the earnings of entrepreneurs.

Where democracies get into financial trouble is when the public sector grows out of control and confiscates more than the private sector can afford to pay. Bill C-60 would implement a budget process that would reduce the size and cost of government, to be affordable. The budget would reduce full-time equivalents by attrition and eliminating positions and would reduce spending by another \$600 million a year. The budget would be balanced by 2015.

Government Orders

On the other side of the floor, there are a lot of members who believe in their heart of hearts that governments exist to decide who gets what. They want to be the ones who write the rules for everyone else to divvy up the pie. They actually think that governing is like contract bargaining. What they do not understand is where wealth comes from. That is our focus. We cut it down, dig it up, manufacture it, reap it from the soil, add value through trade, and we must do it all better through innovation. The budget would help entrepreneurs and businesses that take risks and innovate to create wealth and new jobs for others.

There is something else they do not get. This is a free country, and when taxes get too high people and businesses leave.

• (1225)

I have seen this happen when the NDP, under the leadership of the then member for Toronto Centre—Rosedale, was in power as the NDP premier. The taxes in Ontario became the highest in North America: businesses left in droves; unemployment skyrocketed; government revenues crashed; and government debt more than doubled, from \$38 billion to almost \$100 billion. Ontario was essentially bankrupt.

As Dr. Phil says: “How’s that working for them in Europe today?” Well, how about Greece with 27% unemployment, or Cyprus where bank deposits are being confiscated, or Portugal where the unemployment rate has reached 17%? It is no surprise that these countries are not prospering.

In Canada, we offer a vast land of opportunity which supports and rewards hard work while protecting people’s human and property rights. This government values that above all else.

Budgets must be realistic and express tough decisions made for the long-term success of our country. This budget is building a foundation and structure for a secure future for our children and grandchildren. It closes tax loopholes for tax fairness and improves the integrity of the tax system. It supports innovation and research, and it is a commitment to Canadians that their economy is on the right track. Its success is founded on two major platforms: the first is paying down the debt on time and without excuses; and the second is strategic investment in growth and innovation.

The year 2013 began with a welcome announcement in my riding of Oakville when our Prime Minister visited Canada’s largest Ford plant, the Oakville assembly plant, on January 6. The Prime Minister was there to announce an investment of \$250 million in the automotive innovation fund to 1,000 CAW folks who build these high-quality low-emission cars. The fund is for auto industry firms undertaking large-scale research and development projects that are focused on innovative, greener and more fuel efficient vehicles. The fund is working.

The money invested in Ford’s Windsor engine plant originally created 450 full-time jobs, but since then it has grown to 600 full-time jobs. What is more impressive is that there are 3,000 people working at the Oakville assembly plant who now work full-time as a result of investments made by this government in 2006.

Other projects supported by the AIF include Toyota Motor Manufacturing Canada’s project green light, which includes the production of the RAV4 electric vehicle at Toyota’s plant in

Woodstock; Magna International’s development of clean vehicle technologies, including energy-efficient components and innovative powertrain parts for next-generation vehicles; and construction of a new Toyota blended assembly line that will permit the simultaneous production of both the current Lexus model and the hybrid model.

Perhaps our single biggest problem at this point in our history is addressed in this budget. With hundreds of thousands of Canadians hitting retirement age in the next few years and the emergence of the knowledge economy, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce says that without action we could have over 500,000 unskilled workers who will not be able to find work by 2016. Without action in this budget, there could be over one million skilled job vacancies by 2016. The former president of Seneca College, Rick Miner, summarizes the problem in the title of his report, “People without Jobs, Jobs without People”.

The most significant contribution of this budget is perhaps the creation of the Canada job grant, which could provide \$15,000 or more per person, with matching funds to match people with jobs. This fund will help up to 130,000 Canadians with access to training for the jobs that are available. This will be at community colleges, career colleges and trade union training centres.

This budget and our previous budget have demonstrated that Prime Minister Harper and our Minister of Finance are building our nation to heights we have never seen before—

• (1230)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I will remind the member not to refer to any members of the chamber, including the Prime Minister, by their given name.

Mr. Terence Young: This budget and our previous budget have demonstrated that the Prime Minister and our Minister of Finance are building our nation to heights we have never seen before. Canada is a place where immigrants and investors want to be. We have every reason to be optimistic about our future. I will gladly support this budget and the great economic stewardship of our government.

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Oakville for his speech. However, the thing that is missing in this budget is real job creation. When the Conservatives took over in 2006, there were one-quarter million fewer unemployed individuals in Canada than there are today, which speaks to the Conservatives’ record. There are one-quarter million people who are now unemployed who were not unemployed in 2006. At the same time, we have one-quarter million more temporary foreign workers.

Members can do the math, and it is very simple. The temporary foreign worker program has been increased by the government over the course of its being, which has had a direct impact on the number of people who are unemployed in this country. However, the Conservative government has done nothing about it.

Government Orders

I would like the member to comment on what it is that the government is going to do to correct those numbers and bring more people to more jobs in Canada in a way that is actually going to work. We have heard it all before, and it is not working now.

Mr. Terence Young: Mr. Speaker, I do not know where the member opposite has been for the last few months, but since the end of the recession this government is responsible for the creation of 950,000 net new jobs, most of which are full time.

In addition, it seems the member has totally missed what happened in 2008. I do not know where he was in 2008, but we were here dealing with the most serious recession since the 1930s. This government got this country through that recession. We purposely created a deficit through Canada's economic action plan, and now that the recession is over we are balancing the books.

With specific regard to the member's question on this budget on job creation, in talking about the future and the need for infrastructure in our communities, the roads, bridges and transitways that our children and grandchildren will need, in budget 2013 we have pledged over \$53 billion over 10 years for a new building Canada plan. It is long-term predictable funding that represents the largest and longest federal infrastructure investment in Canadian history.

• (1235)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I give the member credit for sticking to the PMO notes. To what degree the member might even believe some of what he is saying is truly amazing.

When the Conservatives took over the government reigns, the reality was that they had a huge budget surplus. Even prior to the recession taking place, they turned that surplus into a deficit. They had to be brought kicking and screaming by the Liberal Party, who was the official opposition at the time, to provide an economic action plan to keep people employed in this country.

Now when the government members talk about having a balanced budget, members will notice they refer to 2015-16, which is post the next federal election. The Conservative government has never had a balanced budget in the last 100 years. The member should know that.

My question to the member is this. Can he clearly and definitely tell this House when the last time was that the Conservatives, the Progressive Conservatives or the Reform Party in Ottawa have presented a balanced budget to this House.

Mr. Terence Young: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question, but I am not so grateful for his fictitious preamble.

I believe the last time this government balanced the budget was in 2007. However, prior to the recession, which the member might remember started in 2008, this government had a surplus which it reinvested by paying down debt. That is what we promised to do. That is why the voters made us the government. We paid down over \$30 billion of debt, which is what we are supposed to do.

When there is a recession, government money is invested to help people stay working. However, when there is a surplus, the government is supposed to pay down debt. That is acceptable

fundamental economics. That is exactly what we did. We will not apologize for lowering taxes on Canadian families and putting more money into their pockets once the budget was balanced.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am almost sad to get up. I was enjoying the Conservatives and the Liberals going at it on the issue of economics when they should be embracing each other because they both practice the same austerity economics.

Before I start on the issue of Bill C-60, I do want to wish Marg Reilly a very happy birthday. Marg is a constituent of mine. It is a milestone birthday for her, and she is a person worthy of great celebration. Happy Birthday, Marg.

Today we are talking about Bill C-60, the budget implementation act. It is the final of five days of debate on the matter, owing to another Conservative time allocation motion, which is a new record for such motions. I dare suggest that there will be more such motions. There seems to be some kind of narcotic effect to these time allocation motions for those guys. It also, perhaps, is just the arrogance of power.

In his defence of the Conservative time allocation motion, the Minister of State for Finance described this legislation as “the blueprint of our government's mandate moving forward”. He “felt” that five days was more than enough time to debate the bill. As it turns out, what we have before us is another omnibus bill. It is certainly shorter than its predecessor, but still it involves amendments to nearly 50 pieces of legislation, and even introduces new legislation. That means that on average we have less than one hour of debate for each legislative change or legislative invention included under the bill.

Who would have imagined that those so-called champions of transparency and accountability, these parliamentary reformers who sit on the government side, would have ever stood in this place to justify such a limited level of scrutiny—on budget implementation, no less—for parliamentarians, much less to justify it on the basis of what they felt was appropriate, that those reformers would privilege their feelings over the traditions, institutions and processes of governing and government in Canada? It is most certainly a form of tyranny.

This is not simply an issue of process or principle, as those members like to portray it. This is about a government that is failing to do its best for this country and its citizens, a government that has deliberately set a target below the potential of Canada and its citizens. Never mind excellence, never mind maximization, never mind over-achieving, the Conservative government aspires to under-achievement, to less than what is possible, to less than our potential.

This is the recurring narrative in the April 29 economic and fiscal outlook produced by the Parliamentary Budget Office. I want to quote a bit at length here:

PBO projects real GDP growth in Canada to slow to 1.5 per cent in 2013 and remain below its potential growth rate until 2015. Combined with the sluggish recovery in the global economy, government spending restraint will act as an additional drag on growth and job creation. The projected weakness in growth keeps the economy well below its potential GDP through 2015 and as a result the unemployment rate remains relatively stable, averaging 7.3 per cent over 2013 to 2015.

Government Orders

It goes on to talk about employment in Canada being below its potential. That is on page 10, if anybody wants to reference that. It says that employment and “average weekly hours” for Canadian workers are below potential. That is on page 11. “Labour productivity” is below, which is, again, on page 11. Gross domestic product is “below potential”, on page 11 again.

How is all of this happening? Quite curiously, it is happening by design. As the economic and fiscal outlook says, “Over the period 2013 to 2017, PBO estimates that the net impact of [economic action plan] 2013 measures and revisions to spending levels on real GDP and employment is contractionary”. It is 67,000 jobs worth of contractionary, according to the report, which is a .57% reduction in GDP.

• (1240)

The PBO explains that does not mean that employment levels will be 67,000 jobs shy of where we are today. That is fair enough. The report explains it in these terms:

Rather, it means that, in the absence of these measures and revisions to spending levels, projected employment would be higher by 67,000 jobs, all else being equal.

The action in the government's economic action plan is:

...pushing the economy further away from its potential GDP and delaying the economic recovery.

This is worthy of the House's time for extensive debate. I want to know, and Canadians will want to know, why the deliberate path of action chosen by of the current government is to push the economy further away from its potential.

What is particularly perplexing is that the budget comes in the context of a Canada that is already so far shy of its potential.

The government has presided over a \$67 billion trade deficit that is expected to worsen in the year ahead. That is thousands of jobs and billions of dollars leaving this country and going overseas to enrich others.

There are still almost 1.4 million Canadians out of work. There are 240,000 more young people unemployed today than before the recession.

Closer to my home, in Toronto, in my riding of Beaches—East York, I would note a recent report by the United Way and McMaster University showing that nearly 50% of jobs in southwestern Ontario are precarious jobs. A recent report by the Metcalf Foundation shows that the number of working poor is growing in the greater Toronto area. Reports by the Cities Centre at the University of Toronto show the continuing income polarization in our cities, particularly in Toronto, and extrapolate current trends to show a city with a completely hollowed-out middle class.

To be fair, this trend has carried through successive Liberal and Conservative governments, so we cannot blame it all on the guys on the other side.

The only employment numbers growing by a significant measure are for temporary foreign workers, spurred on by the government's inducement of paying significantly lower wages than for Canadian workers.

It is in this context that the government sees it wise to hit the brakes on the economy to constrain economic growth.

This is a set of circumstances that calls for a different kind of action, action that would put Canadians and Canadian cities, which are after all the engines of economic growth in a modern economy, to work—to begin at long last to undo the constraints on our economy, to realize the potential of our country and to make a more equally shared prosperity a goal for this country.

Let us look for a moment at the issue of infrastructure. Here is an economic opportunity that the government has failed to grasp.

By many accounts, the infrastructure deficit in this country is well north of \$150 billion, and it continues to grow. We need to see this problem addressed, and soon. “A penny now or a dollar later”, as the 2012 Canadian Infrastructure Report Card puts it, meaning the cost of delaying needed repairs could cost us vastly larger sums down the road, yet over the next four years, federal infrastructure funding will be \$4.7 billion lower than it was last year, despite some creative advertising by the Conservative government.

This so-called new infrastructure funding announced in budget 2013 includes funding from older, delayed projects. There is \$6 billion worth announced in this new economic action plan that is masquerading as new money when it is actually existing funds that had been committed back in 2007.

This is a budget that would provide no relief for urban congestion in Canadian cities. Owing to successive uninterested Liberal and Conservative governments, the public transit system in Toronto has not grown in any meaningful way since 1980.

In conclusion, what the government needs to explain to Canadians is how it dares to occupy those benches over there when it puts forward a plan that would shrink this country rather than grow it, when it puts forward a plan that would take jobs from Canadians rather than create jobs for them, when it aspires to less than what we are capable of as a country.

How does the government explain that to the youth of this country who have their futures in front of them? How does it explain it to the seniors of this country, who left what they had built up in our hands not so that we could take it down, but so that we could continue to build upon it?

• (1245)

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting but somewhat troubling to hear members of the New Democratic Party and the Liberal Party stand up, speaker after speaker, with an incredibly negative attitude. They can find nothing right with our budget and nothing right with our budget implementation bill. That is very disturbing, because they are totally out of touch with Canadians. In fact, our budget was extremely well received by Canadians, and our economic action plan has allowed business across this country to create 950,000 new jobs since the recession ended. That is an incredible record, yet opposition members are nothing but negative.

Government Orders

I ask the member if he could maybe find one thing from our budget, one thing covered in the budget implementation bill, that he thinks is right with this budget? If he cannot, could he explain why he is so out of touch with how Canadians feel about this budget and this budget implementation bill?

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, if the government did its budgeting right, then we could find something right with the budget. However, as it is, what I would suggest to the member, as we have suggested to the government side, is to divide the bill up and stop playing this game of putting everything into an omnibus bill—50 pieces of legislation, new legislation, amendments to legislation—and standing up day after day saying we disagree with it all. It is because it is all piled into one toxic budget bill.

Let us divide it up and then let us be truthful about the facts. Conservatives talk about 950,000 net new jobs; since 2008, immigration in this country has accounted for at least one million new Canadians, so how does the government talk about net new jobs that cannot even keep up with the immigration rate since the recession?

• (1250)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Beaches—East York for a really quite eloquent speech in assessing this budget. I think he would probably agree with me that there are many things in the budget that are actually good, including first-time incentives for charitable giving and a small but certainly welcome amount of funding to CNIB. Overall, however, I think his analysis is exactly correct.

I want to ask the member if he finds it surprising that the government would boast about programs that it has cancelled. The environment section of the budget talks about the very successful home energy retrofit program, which no longer exists. I wonder if the member would agree with me that the budget would be much improved if that program were resurrected.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, certainly the budget would be improved and our environment would be much improved if that program still existed.

One of the curious things about that program is that when the Minister of the Environment and the Minister of Natural Resources justified ending that program, they did so by trumpeting its great success and the many jobs it created, so there is no rationale for cancelling that job program.

In fact, it becomes an extremely important program for a city like Toronto. One of the curious things about the city that I live in, because of its particular built form, is that over 60% of our greenhouse gas emissions come from heating and cooling the built environment, so a program like the eco-energy program became a critical part of dealing with climate change and with greenhouse gas emissions in a city like Toronto.

I know my constituents very much regret the decision of the government to cancel that program, not only because of the improvements it brought to their own properties and because of their concern about the environment but also because of the great job potential that the program had.

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to stand and speak to our budget implementation bill today.

I want to express from the start how disappointed I am that the opposition, for some reason, cannot find something good about our budget and our budget implementation bill when Canadians have really supported our budget with open arms and very positive endorsements from third parties of all types, including business and union leaders and so on.

However, the opposition members just cannot find it in themselves to say that there is a lot about this budget and this budget implementation bill that is good. That is very disappointing.

They also complain about any program that has been ended by the government since we came to office. The reality is that many of these programs were put in place by previous governments to help meet a policy objective of that previous government. In many cases, that policy objective no longer exists, so why should the program continue indefinitely?

One of those programs the opposition is complaining about was actually put in place 100 years ago. To me, the policy objective made a lot of sense 100 years ago.

The program was the shelterbelt program. That was in the last budget, just as an example. That program was put in place almost 100 years ago to help protect our prairie soil from wind and water erosion, and it was a good program at the time.

However, I suppose many members do not recognize that in the 1980s farmers started direct seeding crops, so this erosion that the shelterbelt program was put in place to protect against simply no longer exists because the soil is not tilled as it used to be and we do not have summer fallow as we used to have. The problem that the program was put in place to solve simply does not exist now, yet the opposition members complain about our government ending even this 100-year-old program that no longer meets a policy objective.

I am going to guess what they would do, and that would be to just have these programs built one on top of another until we would be so far in debt that we simply could not balance the budget in this country and we ended up in the same kind of mess that our neighbours to the south are in.

To me, that is not an acceptable route to take. Our government has committed to balancing the budget by 2015. That is an objective I want to support, even if they do not, and it is an objective that is certainly supported by my constituents.

The opposition cannot find a thing right about the policies being implemented in this budget implementation bill. I want to run some examples by the House. It will be kind of a disjointed presentation here dealing with different issues.

The first issue is the adoption expense tax credit. This was put in place to better recognize that adoptive parents incur costs prior to being matched with a child. A lot of expense goes into that process.

Government Orders

I know that some of my colleagues have adopted children, and they understand this issue very well. There are probably some members on the other side who have adopted children, and they know the costs that go into the process even before the adoptive parents are actually matched with a child.

My niece and her husband tried to adopt children for 10 years, and they just could not do it. They tried a lot of things to make this happen. They have incurred a lot of expenses. What they wanted was a child; they desperately wanted a child. They commented to me on several occasions that the costs are really incredible and that they would appreciate anything that could be done to help them deal with that a little.

They have been blessed. Just a couple of years ago they completed the adoption of their little girl, and currently they have a little boy and are hoping to be able to keep the little boy and adopt him. To them this is important, yet the New Democratic MPs cannot find it in their hearts to say that it is good thing. With the Liberals, it is the same.

What has the leader of the Liberal Party said on this? He has not made a comment on it at all, either on that or on any other policy issue. The leader of the Liberal Party is not in the picture at all.

• (1255)

What else do we have in this budget that would be implemented in this act? There is the mineral exploration tax credit for flow-through shares. NDP members in particular receive a lot of funding from unions, and that is not voluntary. Union members are given no choice. They are forced to pay memberships, and the unions decide whether that money goes to a particular political party. I know that the Conservative members get a lot of support from union members, but it does not come through unions.

NDP members always claim that they are standing up for union members, yet they have not said a good thing at all about this mineral exploration tax credit that would encourage exploration and the development of new mines and that type of thing. That means jobs, and a lot of new union jobs, but can they find it in their hearts to speak on behalf of their union members and say that it makes sense because it would mean a lot of new jobs for union members? No, they cannot.

What has the leader of the Liberal Party said about that? Actually, he has said nothing about that or about any other policy issue I have heard about. He is too busy raising money for the Liberal Party, instead of being here in the House of Commons doing his job. He had one of the worst records in the House of Commons—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The hon. member for Malpeque is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, members are not supposed to suggest whether people are here or not here in this place. That member is insinuating that the leader of the Liberal Party is not here. He is doing good work meeting Canadians across the country, which that Prime Minister—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The member for Malpeque is correct that members ought not to reference who is or is not in the chamber.

The hon. member for Vegreville—Wainwright.

Mr. Leon Benoit: Mr. Speaker, I understand that very well. I was not commenting on whether he was here now. I was just saying that in the past, he has been gone an awful lot.

Another thing this budget implementation bill would deal with is the accelerated capital cost allowance for manufacturing processing machinery and equipment. Again, the opposition parties always claim that they are standing up for union members and unions. Yet they cannot find it in their hearts to say that they support that accelerated capital cost allowance, which would encourage manufacturers to expand, build new plants and create new jobs here in Canada. They just cannot find it in their hearts to say that what the government is doing makes a lot of sense, that it is good for their union members and that they are going to support it. They will not do it. They just cannot be anything but negative. That is what I have heard from the NDP: negative, negative, negative. I get tired of it day after day. It is the same with the Liberals, those of them who are, in fact, here in the House.

Another issue is the additional deduction for credit unions. I have heard one particular member in the Liberal Party, who is a big supporter of co-ops. Lots of members in our caucus are big supporters of co-ops. Probably even some New Democrats are big supporters of co-ops. We hear our members talking about the positive aspects of the additional deduction for credit unions in this budget implementation act. Credit unions, of course, already qualify for the Canadian preferential income tax rate on the first \$500,000 per year of qualifying business income. This would go beyond that, for credit unions in particular. The members claim to be big supporters of co-ops, but what do we hear from them on that issue here in the House of Commons? They are nothing but negative. They cannot find it in their hearts to say that carrying on that credit union special tax exemption is something they can support, because it is good for co-ops, good for their union members and good for the country. They just will not do that.

I just got started. There is a long list of items we would implement in this budget implementation bill that I know their constituents support. Their constituents support it, yet the opposition members cannot find it in their hearts to support their constituents. If they cannot support government or the good things we are doing, at least they should support their constituents. They are not doing that. They are failing them, and they should be ashamed. I encourage them to change their direction and start supporting the good things the government is doing.

• (1300)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to what the member opposite was saying. I must say that I am upset by this government's approach to things.

We know that this bill is not unlike last year's omnibus bills, C-38 and C-45. We know that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance tabled a notice of motion at the Standing Committee on Finance in order to give committee members just five meetings to complete consideration of Bill C-60 and to ensure that clause-by-clause review of the bill is completed by May 27, which is just eight sitting days after the time allocation motion forces passage of the bill at second reading.

Does the hon. member think that five committee meetings will allow enough time to study this bill properly?

[English]

Mr. Leon Benoit: Mr. Speaker, I am sure that the member knows that there are going to be different committees, which is my understanding, looking at different parts of this implementation bill. Certainly every member of Parliament has had the chance to read it, study it and be ready for the committee meetings. If they do that, they have ample time. I have not heard them propose better options for any of the things in this budget implementation bill.

She complains that it is an omnibus bill. Budget bills are always omnibus bills. They deal with a lot of different issues. The last budget dealt with hundreds of different issues. Are we supposed to divide them and deal with each one separately at committee? No. Budget implementation bills are omnibus bills. They implement a budget, which is an omnibus bill. I do not think there is any other way of doing it realistically. We would be trying to implement last year's budget for the next 10 years, quite frankly, if we did it that way.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Vegreville—Wainwright was a little off base when he said that the leader of the Liberal Party has not said anything about this budget. Maybe the member for Vegreville—Wainwright has not been listening. I do not know.

Every day that the leader of the Liberal Party has asked questions in the House, he has talked about the middle class. He has talked about the damage the Conservative Party is doing, through this budget and other measures, to the middle class in this country. He has said things such as that \$550 million annually is coming out of the small business sector, which supports the middle class and is, indeed, the middle class. There is a \$600-million payroll tax hike in this budget, which is hurting the middle class. The member may have slapped aside the leader of the Liberal Party, but he is absolutely wrong. The leader of the Liberal Party is standing up for the middle class.

The member said quite often that we should find it in our hearts. Once when I was in London, England, I came out of a facility and a guy asked if I could find it in my heart to lend him a copper. Could the member find it in his heart to support the middle class?

• (1305)

Mr. Leon Benoit: Mr. Speaker, the member for Malpeque is defending the leader of his party. There is a lot to defend, and I commend him for that. That is his job, quite frankly.

I was talking about the particular issues, which make up almost all of the budget, that his leader, quite frankly, has not commented on at all. He probably will not. As I say, he is too busy raising money to

Government Orders

try to replenish the Liberal coffers. That is part of his job too, but he should be here in the House of Commons at least a good part of the time the House is sitting. He is simply not. I do not think the member will defend his leader for that.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, hon. members, allow me to digress for a moment before getting to the heart of the matter.

The new leader of the Liberal Party knows nothing about the middle class. He does not know what it is like to lose his job or to have to wait for employment insurance benefits. He does not know the problems that come with receiving an unexpected bill. He cannot understand the difficulties the middle class experiences.

As with the last two budget implementation bills, the NDP opposes Bill C-60 for its content and for the process. I will use my time to explain why.

The austerity measures of the past few years, both in North America and in Europe, have not produced the desired economic results, to say the least. Just recently, the staunchest supporters of austerity measures had to acknowledge two mistakes that had been made. Our Conservative friends do not seem to be aware of them or do not understand their implications.

Last October, the International Monetary Fund—the IMF—acknowledged that it had made a calculation error in assessing the impact of those austerity measures, particularly in the southern European countries. What was the error? Simply that it used a fiscal multiplier estimated at a 0.5% drop in GDP. This was seriously underestimated, not a little, but a lot: nearly three times that ratio.

What the IMF is admitting is that the negative factor was not 0.5, it was actually between 0.9 and 1.7. In simple terms, that means that a one-point cutback in public spending did not result in just a 0.5-point drop in GDP, but a drop of between 0.9 and 1.7 points. Understandably, that revelation has caused considerable discomfort in Europe.

There is every reason to think that the real reason for that discomfort is ideological. Yes indeed. Greece was used as a testing ground out of which only one of the two theories of the cosmos would emerge victorious: Keynesian interventionism versus the liberalism of Friedman, which, like our colleagues opposite, hopes to see the state disappear, or at least be reduced to a minimum. The mastermind behind this operation knew all along that it would lead to the irrevocable and permanent disappearance of Keynes's legacy, since it would prove that austerity and nothing but austerity would lead to growth. Small mistake. It is exactly that belief that is shared by our ideologue colleagues opposite.

Government Orders

The IMF experiment turned into a fiasco, a huge fiasco. In Europe, it is responsible for 4,000 suicides, the impoverishment of 3.5 million people and a two-year drop in life expectancy. It is also responsible for an unemployment rate that is beyond comprehension, an explosion in the number of elective abortions, abandoned infants, the dismantling of human lives and families, homeless people in numbers that are out of control, because of the ongoing destruction of the middle class—yes, that is right, we are talking about the middle class—and the intolerable spectacle of Greeks, in the 21st century, hunting through garbage to find something to eat. Those are the horrors of austerity.

Europe seems to be suffering the terrible consequences of a mistaken estimate, in view of the negative growth rates, approaching zero, experienced in recent years and exploding debt followed by unemployment rates that just keep going up.

The International Monetary Fund's chief economist, Olivier Blanchard, has in fact said that economic activity is so weak in Europe that all governments that are still able should do nothing that risks shrinking their social safety net.

Is a shrinking social safety net not what we are seeing in Canada with the planned cuts to employment insurance?

I would like to talk about the second economic error that was recently acknowledged by staunch supporters of austerity measures. Reinhart and Rogoff, two economists at Harvard University, asserted that a country's economic growth slowed when its debt exceeded 80% of GDP. The Conservatives, who abhor deficits, are panicking.

This false economic assumption was used by far too many supporters of fiscal restraint. Numerous countries relied on this study, which was exploited for political purposes, and took the same stance on fiscal restraint, with serious consequences: civil servants' salaries were frozen, there was structural reform, taxes were raised and so on. That is exactly what the Conservatives are proposing with Bill C-60.

• (1310)

On April 17, the attention of economists around the world was focused on a discovery made by Thomas Herndon, a young economist at the University of Massachusetts. With the help of his professors, he recalculated the famous Rogoff and Reinhart numbers. They realized that when debt exceeded 90% of GDP, average growth was not -0.1%, it was 2%. The reason for this difference is that Rogoff and Reinhart do not seem to have included a number of countries in their calculations. They excluded Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Belgium between 1946 and 1950. Their calculations were inaccurate, and the premise that growth stagnates when debt exceeds 90% of GDP is false. Herndon's study proves that.

What does all that mean for Canada? Despite these proven errors, despite the warnings of the International Monetary Fund and the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the Conservative government is sticking to austerity measures by introducing Bill C-60. In a 32-page paper published by his office, the Parliamentary Budget Officer calculated that the Conservative government's 2013 budget will have a net negative impact on the labour market over three years. Employment will fall by 8,000 jobs in 2015, 14,000 in 2016 and

10,000 in 2017. The net impact of the budget-cutting measures that the Conservative government has taken since 2012 will amount to a loss of more than 67,000 jobs in 2017.

The Conservatives, who like to boast of their job creation record, are living in an ideological bubble. In the meantime, 1.5 million Canadians are out of work and we now have 240,000 more unemployed youth than before the recession. Despite that fact, the only measure in Bill C-60 that will create jobs is the addition of new cabinet ministers.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer has clearly stated that the Conservatives' savage cuts announced in budget 2013 are not necessary to restore a structural budget surplus. On the contrary, combined with the anemic global economic recovery, the austerity measures imposed by the Harper government will further slow economic growth and job creation.

Budget 2013 could lower—

• (1315)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. Once again I remind the member not to refer to his colleagues by their given names.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Mr. Speaker, I apologize for referring to the Prime Minister by his surname. I withdraw that remark.

Budget 2013 could lower economic growth by 0.12% and eliminate thousands of jobs, reduce direct program spending and slow growth in gross domestic product. Bear in mind that this year's budget will extend \$5.2 billion in cuts every year until we achieve the alleged zero deficit. Whatever the Conservatives may say, this budget, like the other austerity budgets previously introduced, will slow rather than stimulate Canada's economy.

Why then move so quickly toward eliminating the deficit, despite the International Monetary Fund's urging to calm down, reflect, and rely on something other than known errors of economic theory?

In fact, according to the Parliamentary Budget Officer's calculations, the government will achieve an even larger surplus than planned of \$3.7 billion in 2015-16, when Canadians will go to the polls. Is that the reason for these reductions and cuts, the possibility that the government may have \$3.7 billion in hand before the election to invest at the appropriate time for strictly political purposes?

My colleague Peggy Nash recently mentioned this. In Bill C-60, the Harper government is doing nothing to support—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The use of members' surnames is prohibited.

You have 15 seconds.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Mr. Speaker, I would like to use those 15 seconds to withdraw that remark and to underscore the excellent work done by the official opposition's finance critic.

Government Orders

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my hon. colleague on his excellent speech, which contained a great deal of information and was very well thought out, written and delivered.

The Conservative member who spoke before him said that NDP members are always so negative, that we think there is absolutely nothing good about this budget, that we cannot find any good measures in it. From my perspective, and that of my constituents, this budget is very hard to support. It amends nearly 50 pieces of legislation, and unfortunately, we are under a gag order and will have only five committee meetings to examine this budget implementation bill. The Conservatives' way of doing things is extremely problematic.

I would like to hear my colleague's comments on this, as well as what his constituents think of these measures.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question.

The Conservatives' approach, which consists of using omnibus bills to amend 50, 60 or even 70 acts, makes it impossible for us to single out any measures and give our consent for specific measures. Then, as we have seen over the past two years, we come back to the House for question period and the Conservatives keep saying that we voted against this or that measure. That is not true. I am confident that those watching us at home see what is really going on.

We did not vote against this or that measure. We voted against the fact that some measures, which taken individually could be beneficial, have been grouped with others to try to make us swallow a bitter pill with a spoonful of honey.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, an important issue for many Canadians is assisting young people to not get involved in gangs. I know it is a huge issue in certain areas of our country, Winnipeg being one of them. What we are looking for is a government that uses a proactive approach by providing other opportunities to those individuals who are at high risk of getting involved in gang activities. We would like to see the government include in a budget document some strong, clear direction as to how it plans to deal with the issue of gangs.

Over the last number of years in Winnipeg, gang memberships have skyrocketed to well into the thousands from the low hundreds in the late nineties. This is an issue that continues to be of great concern. I wonder if the member would provide some comment with respect to the role of government allocating resources in order to fight crime by looking at some of the causes of crime.

• (1320)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is right. Providing job opportunities is the most effective way to fight youth crime and all forms of criminal behaviour. It is a proven fact: when people are working and can pay their bills and save up some money, they are less likely to turn to illegal activities.

As for youth, indeed, employment integration measures targeting young people in particular are the best solution to the problem of crime and violent crime.

[*English*]

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to rise today to speak to Bill C-60, the first budget implementation act of 2013.

Economic action plan 2013 is an outstanding budget that responds to the needs of Canadians. It delivers on the priorities that matter to my constituents in Richmond Hill: jobs, a stable economy, low taxes, support for infrastructure, help for the most vulnerable, and investments in science and innovation to build the jobs of the future.

In my time allowed today I will highlight just a few of the ways in which economic action plan 2013 would benefit communities, families and job creators.

During my pre-budget consultations in Richmond Hill, I heard loud and clear from many constituents, local businesses, the Richmond Hill Chamber of Commerce and many others about how essential the gas tax fund has become. It is a source of predictable, stable, long-term funding to municipalities that helps build and revitalize public infrastructure while achieving positive environmental results. This Conservative government under the leadership of the right hon. Prime Minister doubled the gas tax fund in 2009. It was also this government that put legislation in place through economic action plan 2011 to make these funds permanent. This is not a small amount. The gas tax fund is a direct annual investment of \$2 billion delivered directly to municipalities across our great country.

In my riding, the town of Richmond Hill, this important government initiative adds \$5 million each and every year to its coffers. Since we doubled the fund in 2009 that means about \$20 million has helped build essential infrastructure in the town of Richmond Hill. Let me give the House a few examples: \$435,000 in gas tax funds provided the energy-efficient upgrades for our rehabilitated Bond Lake Arena in addition to federal recreational infrastructure contributions of \$712,000, which allowed residents in Oak Ridges and the surrounding area to continue using this important community facility; \$200,000 in gas tax funds was used to install a geothermal heating and cooling system at the Richmond Hill Theatre for the Performing Arts, saving thousands of dollars in operating costs; and \$1.1 million in gas tax funds went toward the rehabilitation of the aging Pioneer Park stormwater facility. Approximately 700 hectares of land, including many new neighbourhoods, are now protected from erosion and flooding.

Millions of dollars have been used to support a collection of energy-efficient projects. These include: a solar heating and snow melting system at the Shaw House in Phyllis Rawlinson Park; a solar pool heating system at Bayview Hill Community Centre; a small wind turbine and solar electrical panels at Richmond Green Park, and the purchase of a fully electric vehicle.

Government Orders

Gas tax funds in Richmond Hill helped the community achieve the honour of being Ontario's first municipality to reach its corporate greenhouse gas reduction target.

Economic action plan 2013 goes even further by proposing to index gas tax funds at 2% per year. It also expands the list of eligible projects to include highways, short-line rail, disaster mitigation, broadband and connectivity activity, brownfield redevelopment, culture, tourism, sport and recreation.

Our government supports infrastructure renewal. It creates jobs and is the fundamental underpinning of healthy communities. I am proud that economic action plan 2013 includes the historic building Canada plan, the largest long-term federal commitment to infrastructure in our nation's history.

• (1325)

The plan allocates \$53.5 billion over the next 10 years for provincial, territorial and municipal infrastructure.

In addition to the gas tax funds, building Canada includes a community improvement fund, which would provide \$32 billion to municipalities, over and above what they now receive, for projects such as roads, public transit and recreational facilities.

A new building Canada fund would provide \$14 billion to support major projects across the country, and \$1.25 billion would support innovative ways to build infrastructure projects faster and at good value for Canadians through a renewed P3 Canada fund. An additional \$6 billion would be provided to provinces, territories and municipalities under the current infrastructure programs in 2014, 2015 and beyond.

Our government is committed to helping Canadian manufacturers better compete in the global economy. That is why we have established the lowest tax burden on new business investment in the G7. Economic action plan 2013 would add to this. The temporary accelerated capital cost allowance rate for qualifying assets has been extended. Canadian manufacturers would receive an additional \$1.4 billion in tax relief when investing in new machinery and equipment.

We are also supporting our manufacturers by modernizing Canada's general preferential tariff regime for developing countries. Since 1974, Canada has granted preferential market access to imports from developing countries as a way to help those countries develop and grow economically. However, after nearly 40 years, the global economic landscape has changed considerably. Significant economic advancement has been made by some of these developing countries. In response, last year our government undertook a comprehensive review of the preferential tariff regime, including a thorough public consultation.

Economic action plan 2013 acts on the results of these consultations and effective January 1, 2015, benefits would be removed from 72 higher income and export-competitive economies. We think it is time that certain nations that have done well in developing their economies over the years compete with Canadian manufacturers on a more even footing.

At the same time, effective on April 1 this year, \$79 million in annual tariff relief on imported baby clothing and certain sports

equipment was enacted. Consumers and families will see lower prices for these items.

Economic action plan 2013 supports the long-term competitiveness of industries in southern Ontario. It proposes almost \$1 billion over five years to renew the Federal Economic Development Agency for southern Ontario. Let me give an example of how important this initiative is.

In my riding of Richmond Hill, FedDev Ontario helped diversify our industrial base with assistance to leading-edge technology companies. One such company was Qvella Corporation. That crucial injection of capital helped develop and bring to market that company's groundbreaking bacteria identification system. The result was a faster diagnosis of bacterial infections in patients and more high-quality jobs for Richmond Hill.

The renewal of FedDev Ontario will help many more entrepreneurial businesses like Qvella to create jobs and contribute to economic growth. I am very pleased to see its proposed renewal in economic action plan 2013.

I will close by saying that balancing the books is important to my constituents. Upon assuming office in 2006, our Conservative government, under the leadership of our Prime Minister, undertook an aggressive plan to pay down the debt. We are working toward that, to balance the budget by 2015-16.

I encourage all members in this House to join me in supporting the swift passage of Bill C-60 as it will assist Canadian families immediately.

• (1330)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague's comments. The problem is that he did not describe Canadians' economic reality.

At present, the number of unemployed is going up, the participation rate is going down and household debt is increasing. That is the reality.

If my colleague toured his riding, he would see that there are more unemployed workers today than in 2007. That is the problem. We are not talking about made-up figures. Canadians have been facing difficult economic conditions for a long time, since 2007.

The government continues to rely on the same old measures.

When will this government realize that these measures are not working? How does he explain the fact that there are so many unemployed people?

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Mr. Speaker, I would urge the hon. member to put aside the talking points of the NDP and what he gets out of the office of the Leader of the Opposition and consider some of the facts. Our government has cut taxes for Canadians 150 times. That has put \$3,200 each and every year in the pockets of Canadian families. We have reduced the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%. We have repeatedly brought measures in the House that assist Canadian families by providing more disposable funds available to them from their incomes.

I would urge the hon. member and members of his party to put those partisan political lines aside and to vote in favour of the implementation of this budget that would benefit their constituents as much as it would benefit my constituents and indeed all Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to ask the member for Richmond Hill a question, and it will not be partisan; it will be, in fact, facts. The fact of the matter is that in this budget there is a \$550 million tax on small business. There is a \$600 million payroll tax, and those taxes would be annual. However, the member talked about the reductions in the tariffs that would make hockey equipment and a few other items cheaper. He failed to mention the fact that the tariff changes on many products that come into this country would be changed to the extent that it would take \$338 million out of ordinary Canadians' pockets. That comes right out of these pockets right here. They are empty now, and the Conservative government would be taxing middle-class Canadians even further. Why does he fail to mention that \$338 million tax increase on those products, and how can he support this bill with this attack on the middle class?

• (1335)

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Malpeque for his question, although I do not agree with the premise of his question. In my speech I made it abundantly clear that certain benefits to tariffs would be taken off; they were given to countries whose economies have grown, and they were initially put in place for those economies to be assisted in some way.

We are putting Canadian businesses on an equal footing with countries that want to export their products to Canada. What I hear every day in Richmond Hill from my constituents and from Canadians across the country is that they would like to see Canadian manufacturers and Canadian products be on an equal footing so that Canadians can benefit economically.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to speak to Bill C-60 today. I have a very difficult time supporting the bill for a wide variety of excellent reasons.

One of the things I have noted about the government, more so than any other government I have had the opportunity to serve in opposition to over the last 20-plus years, is that this government sees the value of political spin like no other. It has no hesitation whatsoever in using taxpayer dollars to get that spin out there. We see that with member after member on the government benches talking from the speaking notes of the Prime Minister's Office.

Listening to some of the speeches, I often wonder if it could have been a speech from the opposition benches, which could have been

used against the government, especially when it starts to talk about being financially responsible, because this has not been a government that has been financially responsible with taxpayers' dollars. A good example of that, and tying into the spin, is the economic action plan. I would classify it as a dud, and I have had the opportunity to do that before. It just does not have the impact that the Government of Canada should have, given the millions and billions of dollars that are being spent.

If we were to canvas Canadians I think we would find that they are starting to get a little upset with the government and the amount of tax dollars it is spending promoting the budget. The number of commercials is unbelievable. Whether on NHL playoffs or whatever, the commercials are there. In print and on television, the government has a message and it wants to sell that message. It will not spare a dime of taxpayer dollars doing that. Whatever it takes, it is prepared to saturate with that message.

What I would like to do is just focus a little attention on the bigger picture, the reality of the Conservative-Reform government that Canadians have had to witness over the last number of years.

Let us look at many of the speeches in which the Conservatives talk about the banking industry. They love to assume the credit for the banking industry and how solid the Canadian banks are today. Not only do they crow inside the House; they do it outside the House and even internationally. The reality is that it was Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin, as the minister of finance, who resisted the changes that were taking place around the world regarding deregulating the banking industry and allowing banks to merge and become even larger. It was the government during the 90s that ensured we have one of the best banking industry today, and many would argue that it is the best.

It had nothing to do with this Prime Minister. He cannot take any credit. One of his actions was that his government went ahead and increased mortgages from 25 years to 40 years. Of course, it flip-flopped on that one after it realized it had made a mistake. The Conservatives have not done anything really to solidify the banking industry.

Let us look at the credit that would be taken away from our credit unions. For many of these credit unions, which provide competition to our banks and provide excellent consumer services, particularly in our rural regions from coast to coast to coast, millions of dollars would be taken away in the form of tax credits and so forth. Those have gone a long way in the survival of our credit unions, allowing them to grow and provide that competition. In Winnipeg's north end, we have only had a credit union, and it has actually expanded. That has been the impact they have had on that particular industry.

If we talk about budget surpluses and deficits, historically, Conservatives have not done well in terms of having surplus budgets.

• (1340)

We know that for a fact. The reality with this particular government is that when it took office, it inherited a multi-billion dollar surplus. Before the recession even took place, it turned that surplus into a deficit situation. The Conservative government has presented a deficit ever since then.

Government Orders

The government knows that Canadians recognize that at times the books have to be balanced. What does the government say? It says that it is going to balance them in 2015-16. That is after the next federal election.

Why should we believe that? Why should Canadians believe that Conservatives even have the ability to balance the books when they have been such a disaster in terms of their predictions in dealing with balancing the books. They have failed miserably. They inherited this wonderful trade surplus, which brought in hundreds of millions of additional dollars to Canada and which created tens of thousands of jobs.

That surplus turned into a multi-billion deficit. That is the record of this particular Conservative-Reform government we have today.

Speaker after speaker likes to get up and talk about taxes. They like to give the impression that the Conservatives know how to give tax breaks. In the last three or four year, in the last three or four budgets that have been presented by the government, we have actually seen net tax increases, each one tens of millions of dollars.

This is not a government that is friendly to the taxpayer or, in particular, to the middle class of Canada. Some of the taxes that the Conservatives have put into place make us want to give our head a shake and wonder where the compassion is. We have raised these issues in question period.

Imagine now that people want to go to a hospital and visit someone. The government came up with an interesting tax; it is going to tax parking at the parkade or at the meters. We have a new parking tax that is being implemented by the government.

What about victims of crime who require certain medical tests that might be necessary or that would provide peace of mind, if in fact they were able to get the medical tests that they believe are necessary for them? We are talking about victims of crime. The government has found a new way of taxing those victims of crime, for mental services, as an example.

The Conservatives have well over 1,000 new tariff increases. The bottom line is that they can talk all they want; they can say that they are going to cut taxes or that their government believes in cutting taxes, but in reality that is just not true.

There have been net tax increases in the last four budgets. The middle class is being hit hard by the government. People who are 35 to 55, who have a quality job but find themselves unemployed for whatever reason, have to try to find employment, which is hard for this age group, especially if it comes to trying to get a job of some sort of equivalent pay to what they were receiving before. What in this budget allows those individuals to feel optimistic?

We can kind of get a sense of the mentality of the government towards labour by looking at the temporary foreign worker program, a program that traditionally has been exceptionally successful, under Liberal administrations, and that has derived many benefits for all residents of Canada. It illustrates the need and the way in which the government has made a mess of things.

I look forward to any potential questions.

● (1345)

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the member opposite's speech. I have a couple of questions for him, but first I have a comment.

The member mentioned victims' rights. Obviously, there has been no government in Canadian history that has supported victims as much. The member had a chance, through some legislation that passed through this House, to assist victims by doubling the victim surcharge. The member voted against it, and I would like him to explain his record on that.

Second, the member has said that there have been changes in parking lots adjacent to hospitals. I would like to know whether the member favours having these privately held parking lots receive a government or medical benefit. Is he saying that these private corporations should continue to receive that kind of subsidy?

The member also talked about deficits and the need to bring the deficit down. I agree. I would like to hear from this member what date he proposes, because every time we bring forward spending reductions to bring us back to balanced books, that member's party voices opposition to them. I would like to hear from the member opposite.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, first I will deal with visiting a sick relative in hospital.

Provinces are ultimately responsible for the administration of health care. They are responsible for everything, including parking lots. However, the Conservative government has found a way to generate more taxes by saying that if someone uses a parking lot, whether it is a provincial government parking lot or a private lot, it will be the middle-class consumer who will pay an additional tax.

That is just one example. If we add up all the tax increases, we will find that there is a net tax increase. When the Conservatives decrease a tax, they spend millions of public tax dollars on ads to promote the tax cuts. Obviously, they do not spend money to tell Canadians that they have increased taxes, and they have increased taxes more than they have cut taxes.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, you probably noticed the number of Conservative members who started to blush when the member for Winnipeg North spoke the truth about the surplus created by the former Liberal government before the current government took over. He spoke the truth about the former Liberal government refusing to reform or change our banking system, which the current Prime Minister demanded. Thank goodness we did not make those changes. You probably saw them blush when the member mentioned that the Conservatives are now trying to take credit for it. I hope you noticed that, Mr. Speaker. It is important.

I would like to hear from the member about the myth the government is propagating that if we do not increase tariffs, we will be flooded with foreign products and that we have to increase those tariffs, because countries like China no longer need protection. That might be the case if we were producing those products here in Canada, but we are not. Those products will still come in, but those prices will go up. I wonder if the member could speak about that fact.

Government Orders

• (1350)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has a way of trying to create a situation to justify making some sort of policy announcement. The increase in tariffs are nothing more than a tax cash grab.

It is just like when the Government of Canada, in the last budget, said that it would increase the age of retirement. Canadians will no longer be able to retire at age 65; it will now be age 67. The Conservatives said that it was because we have a crisis and cannot afford it, even though the independent officers recognized that Canada was in an excellent financial position and could afford it. The Conservatives create an impression that is just wrong.

The government knows how to increase taxes in a hidden and cruel fashion that affects our middle class. They should reflect on the degree to which they are taking Canadians for hundreds of millions of new tax dollars in this fiscal year alone.

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to stand in the House today to speak to the budget implementation act. Since the depths of the recession in July 2009, our Conservative government has created 900,000 net new jobs, and this was due to our economic action plan. Economic action plan 2013 would build on this strong economic foundation by creating even more jobs, growth and long-term prosperity for Canadians.

Every year leading up to the budget, I undertake extensive pre-budget consultations with my constituents right across my riding of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry. This year, I received overwhelming feedback from my constituents that they want a budget focused on job creation, economic growth and a return to balanced budgets.

There is an old saying that if we want to know where people are going, we should look at where they have been. I believe that applies to governments as well, so let us take a look at where we have been.

Since 2006, we have cut taxes 150 times, reducing the overall tax burden to its lowest level in over 50 years. We have cut taxes in every way governments collect them: personal income taxes, consumption taxes, business and corporate taxes, excise taxes and much more. In fact, our strong record of tax relief has meant savings for a typical family of four in 2013 of over \$3,200.

Economic action plan 2013 would build on these tax reductions. Economic action plan 2013 would eliminate tariffs on baby clothing, sporting goods and athletic equipment. In total, this represents \$76 million in savings for Canadian taxpayers.

Our government also introduced a new temporary first-time donor's super credit for first-time claimants of the charitable donations tax credit. It would encourage all young Canadians to follow in the footsteps of their fathers and mothers and donate to charity. To encourage charitable giving by new donors, this measure would provide an additional 25% tax credit for a first-time donor on up to \$1,000 in monetary donations. I see this being a big hit in Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, because it is already known as one of the most charitable ridings in Canada.

Our government will also improve benefits for Canadian veterans through changes to the war veterans allowance, which would result in over 3,100 veterans being eligible for this allowance for the very first time. In addition, an estimated 5,350 veterans and survivors would benefit from the change. The war veterans allowance program provides assistance to low-income veterans of the Second World War and the Korean War as well as their survivors. Eligibility for the program and the range of benefits provided depends, of course, on a recipient's income.

Under the terms of eligibility for the current program, a veteran's total calculated income includes the disability pension provided by Veterans Affairs Canada. To better assist veterans who have served their country, our government, as a result of proposed amendments to the Pension Act and the War Veterans Allowance Act, will no longer take the disability pension into account when determining eligibility and in calculating the benefits provided under the war veterans allowance. Our veterans, especially veterans in Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, will really appreciate this benefit.

Economic action plan 2013 would also support high-quality, value-added jobs in important sectors of the Canadian economy, such as manufacturing, through tax relief for new investment in manufacturing equipment. To support new investment in machinery and equipment in the manufacturing and processing sectors, this measure would extend the temporary accelerated capital allowance rate for machinery and equipment acquired by a taxpayer, primarily for use in Canada, for the manufacturing or processing of goods for sale or lease. Extending the accelerated capital cost allowance for only two years would increase support for manufacturers by almost \$1.4 billion and would create tens of thousands of jobs for hard-working Canadians.

• (1355)

Economic action plan 2013 would also provide better support for job-creating infrastructure in municipalities across Canada by indexing the gas tax fund. That would be \$32.2 billion over 10 years through gas tax fund payments and the incremental GST rebate for municipalities. It would provide stable and predictable funding to support community infrastructure projects that will improve the quality of life for all Canadian families.

We have six municipalities in Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, and all six mayors and councils are singing our praises for the gas tax fund and for indexing it and making it permanent. I have a couple of mayors of the Liberal persuasion, and even they are singing our praises. That shows how popular this is.

Statements by Members

As members know, our seniors built this wonderful country we call Canada. We owe them a huge debt of gratitude. Our government is committed to helping ensure that Canadian seniors receive the compassionate care they need and deserve. The Pallium Foundation of Canada works to improve the quality of palliative end-of-life care for Canadians by creating educational resources for primary care professionals. Economic action plan 2013 proposes funding of \$3 million to support training in palliative care for front-line health care providers. This investment would build on the funding provided in budget 2011 being used to support the initiative called the way forward: moving toward community-integrated hospital palliative care in Canada, which aims to help develop new community-integrated palliative care models right across Canada.

Economic action plan 2013 would also reform the temporary foreign worker program to ensure that Canadians are given the first chance at available jobs. To strengthen and improve the temporary foreign worker program, the government is introducing legislation and regulatory and administrative changes that would be effective immediately. They would temporarily suspend the accelerated labour market opinion process; would seek to increase the government's authority to suspend and revoke work permits and labour market opinions if the program was misused; would seek to introduce fees for employers for processing labour market opinions; and would increase the fees for work permits so that taxpayers would no longer be subsidizing the cost. These changes would strengthen and improve the temporary foreign worker program to support our economic recovery and growth and would ensure that more employers hire Canadians before hiring temporary foreign workers.

As members can see, we are building on our successes of the past seven years to make Canada an even better place to live, work and play. Is it not a shame that the two opposition parties will not join in this wonderful, great success story? We are going to do all this, and we are going to eliminate the deficit. What a Minister of Finance we have, and we cannot get the support of the people across the way to encourage this finance minister to slay this deficit. I cannot for the life of me understand why our worthy colleagues on the opposite side of the House will not join us and celebrate this wonderful economic action plan 2013.

● (1400)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The time for government orders has expired. The five minutes of questions and comments for this hon. member will take place following question period.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

SYRIA

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to extend my warmest greetings to Orthodox Christians in Ahuntsic and around the world who, this week, celebrated Easter, a holiday of hope and great promise.

On this occasion, I cannot remain silent about the recent kidnappings in Syria Of Msgr. Yohanna Ibrahim, a Syrian Orthodox

bishop from Aleppo, and Msgr. Boulos Yazigi, a Greek Orthodox bishop from the same town.

These kidnappings are one facet of the terrible human drama currently confronting the Syrian people, especially seniors, women and children.

More than ever, Canada must take action to protect Canadians still living in the midst of the bombing because the government refuses to issue visas to their immediate family members. Canada must also be compassionate and help the thousands of refugees and people belonging to persecuted minorities targeted by acts of violence.

Many Canadians and Quebeckers have family members there. No matter the community they belong to, they are united in calling on the federal government to take action. The time for rhetoric, photo ops and fine speeches is over. We must take action.

* * *

[*English*]

ARCTIC COUNCIL

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as president of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association, it gives me great pleasure to congratulate the Minister of Health and member for Nunavut on assuming the role of chair of the Arctic Council at next week's ministerial meeting in Kiruna, Sweden.

During her two-year term as chair, the minister will be promoting the overall theme of development of the people of the north, with responsible arctic resource development, safe arctic shipping, and sustainable circumpolar communities as areas of focus.

The minister is an ideal choice for this prestigious role. As the first Inuk to hold the post of chair, the minister will be a strong champion and will advance the government's arctic foreign policy and our domestic northern strategy.

We are a proud and strong arctic nation. As the north faces new challenges, I know that as a northerner herself, the minister will represent Canada's Arctic as the true north strong and free.

* * *

[*Translation*]

BELOEIL—MONT-SAINT-HILAIRE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the hard work of the Société d'histoire de Beloeil—Mont-Saint-Hilaire, which published its 100th history booklet last week after 33 years of publication.

The Société d'histoire de Beloeil—Mont-Saint-Hilaire stays active and works hard to bring my community's rich history to life.

On April 26, 2013, I had the huge honour and pleasure of attending the launch of the 100th history booklet, *Notre histoire, notre mémoire: hommage à nos bâtisseurs*, a tribute to the community's founding fathers. I attended the launch, which was held at the Maison de la culture Villebon de Beloeil, with Alain Côté, the president of the historical society, whom I want to congratulate personally.

Statements by Members

I urge all of my colleagues and all Canadians to visit my region, to learn about its rich history and to get their own copy of the 100th history booklet.

Thank you and congratulations to all of the volunteers who worked so hard to help publish this history booklet that is so important to the history of my region and my community.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL MARCH FOR LIFE

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand today to talk about an amazing event that will take place this week in the nation's capital. It is the 2013 National March For Life.

On Wednesday, at 7:30 p.m., we will have a pro-life prayer service and a pro-life mass. This will be followed by a candlelight vigil for the victims at the Human Rights monument.

Then, on Thursday, at 12 noon, we will have a rally here on the Hill, followed by the March For Life through downtown Ottawa.

This is to be followed, at six o'clock in the evening, by the Rose Dinner and the Youth Banquet at the Hampton Inn here in Ottawa.

The events will conclude on Friday with the Youth Conference for Life.

I am proud to stand here today to thank everyone involved in the pro-life movement for the work they do, and to congratulate them for the efforts they put forth to have this wonderful March For Life, which is such an important issue for all of us.

* * *

• (1405)

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Equitas Society was formed in 2011 to support veterans returning from Afghanistan.

These veterans feel disadvantaged by the new veterans charter. The charter was meant to be a living document, one that is open for review and improvement. Only one such review has taken place in the last seven years, and the Conservatives are now dragging their feet to delay a second one.

Today we are debating a budget bill that allocates funds owing to disabled veterans after the Conservatives lost a five-year court battle, yet the Conservatives continue to fight disabled RCMP veterans in court over their disability pensions.

The Equitas Society has sued the government to win equality for injured Afghan vets as compared to individuals receiving workers' compensation benefits. The first day in court is tomorrow.

It does not have to be this way. Instead of digging in, the Conservatives should do the right thing and enter into negotiations with Equitas and settle this lawsuit. They should treat these Afghan veterans with respect.

Equitas representatives will be on the Hill tomorrow. The Liberal Party calls upon the government to sit down with them and resolve the lawsuit.

* * *

GREY AND SIMCOE FORESTERS

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this Thursday I will be attending a special dinner held by Barrie's local reserve infantry regiment, the Grey and Simcoe Foresters, to raise funds to support events in appreciation of the visit by Her Royal Highness Princess Anne this fall to Canadian Forces Base Borden, and for a special ceremony at which the regiment will receive its official new colours for the first time in 30 years.

As one of the guest speakers for the evening, I will have the honour of being joined by Lieutenant-General Peter Devlin, Commander of the Canadian Army, and Honorary Colonels Jamie Massie and Barry Peacock.

I am proud to support our infantry reservists from the Grey and Simcoe Counties who have served with distinction in this institution so proudly steeped in history.

I would like to recognize all members of the Grey and Simcoe Foresters, past and present, for their outstanding service and commitment to peace and security. I congratulate them on their excellent fundraising event. I know it will be an excellent success this Thursday.

* * *

SPORTS BETTING

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for months now, an important bill that passed through the House unopposed has sat in the Senate penalty box waiting for a final vote at third reading.

Bill C-290 would legalize single events sports betting in Canada and is a game changer for the largest segment of the entertainment industry in Canada. With hundreds and thousands of jobs, massive public investment and billions of dollars of public revenue at stake, the government is a healthy scratch on Bill C-290, while the unaccountable Senate fumbles the ball.

In addition to all-party support in the elected House, both business and labour groups across Canada are fans of C-290. The government is blowing this call, turning a blind eye to a major interference penalty from a small group of unaccountable senators clogging up the progress on this critical bill.

Worse, by sitting this one out, bookies, gangsters and illegal online gaming sites rake in another season of windfall profits.

We know that in the past the government has pushed legislation through the Senate. Why is its approach so weak now on Bill C-290, just inches from the goal line?

*Statements by Members***ALBERTA SPORTS TEAMS**

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, central Alberta's sports teams have seen an excellent start to 2013.

Last week the Red Deer Optimist Chiefs hockey team, coached by Doug Quinn, won the 2013 Telus Cup in Sault Ste. Marie, claiming Canada's 40th national midget championship. The Chiefs also won this championship last year, becoming just the fourth team ever to win back-to-back gold medals at the national midget Triple-A hockey tournament.

On April 20, Red Deer skip Rob Armitage won gold for Canada at the world senior curling championships. Rob's team included third Keith Glover, second Randy Ponich, alternate Lyle Treiber, and lead Wilf Edgar, who happens to be a former student of mine. That is right: my former student is a world champion senior curler.

It has been an excellent start to the year for these Red Deer athletes, and with many other winter sports heading into Olympic trials later this year, I am certain that central Alberta's athletes will continue to stand out.

Congratulations to the Red Deer Optimist Chiefs and Rob Armitage's curling team.

* * *

DANCE IN MANITOBA

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, dance is one of the most widely understood and celebrated art forms in the world, and it is alive and well in Winnipeg South Centre. It is one activity that is able to build bridges and bring together people of other cultures.

The Manitoba dance community is a vibrant and unique group that combines the preservation of dance heritage with constant innovation and outreach. It is recognized in Canada and throughout the world for its artistic excellence and cultural diversity.

We founded Canada's first professional ballet company and oldest modern dance company. In fact, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet celebrates its 75th anniversary season and Winnipeg's Contemporary Dancers celebrates its 50th, all in 2014. Both of these organizations have incredible educational outreach programs. In fact, it is my daughter's dance recital tonight at one of them.

I know first-hand just how important dance can be to families. We celebrate dance together, throughout Canada, Manitoba and Winnipeg South Centre.

* * *

●(1410)

[Translation]

BUFFET OF NATIONS

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on May 4, the Service d'aide aux Néo-Canadiens, an organization that is well known in Sherbrooke, held its 42nd annual Buffet of Nations.

Every year, hundreds of newcomers to Canada decide to settle in Sherbrooke either to work or to go to school, and they are an important part of our great city. The Service d'aide aux Néo-Canadiens is a vital service for them.

At this year's event, hundreds of guests had the opportunity to sample the cuisine of over 32 countries. The organization intends to use the money raised for two specific purposes in the coming year: to help children to integrate into their schools and succeed, and to give newcomers who have little education the opportunity to participate in a workshop to help them in their job search.

I had the opportunity to participate in this very important event, which was held last Saturday. There, I met with residents of Sherbrooke from all over the world.

The Buffet of Nations is a reflection of what Sherbrooke really is: a city of true inclusion and integration, but more importantly, a city with a wonderful community spirit.

Congratulations to the Service d'aide aux Néo-Canadiens. See you next year.

* * *

[English]

MENTAL HEALTH WEEK

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, May 7 to 13 is CMA's national Mental Health Week. This week's theme, "mental health for all", reminds us that our mental health plays an important role in creating healthy and fulfilling lives for all Canadians.

Mental health is a priority for our government. The signing of the Declaration on Prevention and Health Promotion, which recognizes the benefits of good mental health, the provision of \$245 million for mental health for first nations and Inuit communities across Canada and the support of the establishment of the Mental Health Commission of Canada, has demonstrated what our government has done on this issue.

Like the CMA, I want to congratulate other mental health champions, including Emily Doer, a constituent of mine who was working hard this week to raise awareness and reduce the stigma associated with mental illness. Individuals like Emily are inspiring others with mental illnesses to speak up.

Congratulations to our Minister of Health, the CMA and Emily Doer for leading the way.

* * *

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the United Nations has released its draft report on the universal periodic review of Canada's domestic human rights record. Following our last review in 2009, Canada pledged to consider ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture, yet here we are four years later, and the Conservative government is still considering this very serious matter.

What this optional protocol does is to establish an international inspection system for persons in jails that is modelled after the European system that has been in place since 1987. In the current report, our allies, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Australia and the Netherlands, recommend that Canada join the civilized world and ratify this convention.

Considering that OPCAT was adopted by the UN in 2002, this means that Canada has had 11 long years, with first the Liberal government and now the Conservative government, to consider ratifying it.

Canadians are left wondering when the government will finally do the right thing and ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture.

* * *

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE OF CANADA

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday it came to light that an individual convicted of a horrific murder, allegedly inspired by the TV show *Dexter*, was permitted to watch this very show from his prison cell. My constituents find this incredibly upsetting. Crime victims are demanding to know why he has had access to violent material that is closely linked to his heinous crimes.

Common sense dictates that violent criminals should not have access to violent TV content, particularly when this precise content has inspired their crimes. In this case, he even assumed Dexter's identity online and wrote extensively about his desire to become a serial killer.

Correctional Service of Canada's own directive on appropriate material for prisoners states that material is not permitted that could jeopardize the safety of individuals.

The good news is that taxpayers do not subsidize cable for convicted criminals. However, the prison system should take a look at how it makes decisions on correctional plans. The corrections system should be correcting criminal behaviour, not giving convicted murders access to the materials that inspired their crimes.

* * *

BIRTHDAY CONGRATULATIONS

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about a great Prince Edward Islander. Everett MacDougall was born on May 7, 1913, in West Cape, Prince Edward Island. In 1948, he opened his own poultry and egg grading business in Vernon. He then started buying and shipping farm produce. Shortly after, he was approached by Canada Packers to start a Shur-Gain feed mill. When a tragic fire struck five years later, Everett turned the disaster into an opportunity and built a new quality feed mill equipped with all the modern equipment and employed 15 to 20 people.

Everett was involved in his community's life, serving on the Bunbury Town Council for seven years, and he was an avid volunteer.

Statements by Members

Everett is the oldest Mason on Prince Edward Island and will receive his 70-year pin this afternoon from Allison Coles, Grand Master for P.E.I., at Andrews Lodge.

On behalf of all members of the House of Commons, I want to wish Everett a very happy 100th birthday.

* * *

● (1415)

LEADER OF THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Brampton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been 26 days since the leader of the NDP failed veterans and Canadians after standing by terrible comments on World War I from his senior attack man. Adding insult to injury, the NDP leader has again failed to retract an outrageous belief from his caucus that Canadians should not spend time remembering the sacrifices made by Canadian veterans.

The leader of the NDP's sheep's clothing has fallen. He cannot hide the fact that his party believes that communist dissension and socialism should be supported at the expense of Canadian veterans. His party remains ideologically opposed to anything that commemorates our veterans' heroic contributions.

Enough is enough. The time to apologize and retract these hurtful comments is now.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems the new Conservative hobby is trolling the Internet, hunting down quotes the PMO boys can twist around and use to play partisan politics with Canada's veterans. Conservatives launched make-believe attacks on the opposition to distract from their mismanagement of Veterans Affairs. Conservatives dragged disabled veterans through the courts over pension clawbacks. They made the appeals process for benefits a nightmare. They short-changed the Last Post Fund to the point of embarrassment; and then there are the Conservative privacy violations: Sean Bruyey, Sylvain Chartrand and so many others had their most private information callously breached.

Canadian veterans deserve better than a minister focused on using them to score cheap political points. Fortunately, veterans can always trust the NDP to stand up for them and their families. We will stand up for their privacy; we will stand up for their rights; and we will stand up for their dignity. New Democrats will always give veterans and their families the respect and support they so richly deserve.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is working on what matters to Canadians: jobs and economic growth.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Last week, Statistics Canada announced that Canada's economy grew 0.3% in February. This was better than economists' expectations. Thanks to our government, Canada's job growth record remains the best among G7 countries. Canada is the only G7 country with a top credit rating and stable outlook from all major agencies.

The OECD projects Canada will lead the G7 in economic growth over the next 50 years. KPMG ranked Canada the most tax-competitive economy among mature markets.

While we are focused on the economy, the NDP wants to impose a \$20-billion job-killing carbon tax on Canadians that would raise the price of gas, food, electricity and almost everything. On top of that, the NDP leader's reckless \$56 billion in unaffordable new spending would ruin the economy.

On the government side of the House, Conservatives will remain focused on what matters to Canadians: jobs and economic growth.

ORAL QUESTIONS

*[Translation]***GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURES**

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the President of the Treasury Board gave us a new series of excuses to try to justify how he lost track of just \$3.1 billion. He even tried to blame the NDP, which is absolutely ridiculous. It is true that the Liberals are partly to blame for the chaotic management from 2001 to 2005 and that they were experts at losing taxpayers' money, but blame the NDP? No way.

Since the Conservatives are the ones in power for the moment, does the Prime Minister accept that his minister cannot say where the \$3.1 billion went?

- (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General clearly said that these reports raise no red flags.

He did mention a lack of clarity in government reports in that respect. He made certain recommendations, and we intend to follow them.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are blue flags.

[English]

I guess the Prime Minister did not catch question period yesterday, so let me read him the full quote from the Auditor General, not just the part Conservatives like to repeat,

...it's important for there to be...a way for people to understand how this money was spent and that summary reporting was not done.

We all know the President of the Treasury Board is full of excuses. Yesterday he called losing track of over \$3 billion an "internal" matter.

The question for the Prime Minister is quite simple. Does the Prime Minister agree with his minister that losing track of \$3 billion of public money is none of the public's business?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, that of course is simply not accurate.

As the Auditor General said, he has no concerns about improper use or missing money. What he has concerns about is the clarity and categorization of reporting between government departments over the 2001 to 2009 period. He has made certain recommendations to improve that process, and the government will be following those.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Right, Mr. Speaker, so let me get it straight. When the Liberals lose \$1 billion, for them it is a boondoggle. When the Conservatives lose \$3 billion, for them it is business as usual.

A year ago the Minister of Human Resources was warned that temporary foreign workers were being used to fill jobs in the same fields as unemployed Canadians.

Let me try another simple question. If the Minister of Human Resources knew about all of this a year ago, why did the Prime Minister deny that there was a problem until just last week?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, exactly the contrary is true. Not only has the government indicated for some time that it would be reforming the temporary foreign workers program, but in the budget last year specifically we brought in measures to better match job vacancies with people who are seeking work or in the employment insurance system. We have been very clear. We need to do a better job of matching the demand for EI and the demand for temporary foreign workers. That is precisely what the government has been doing for a year and a half while, by the way, the NDP has been writing to us demanding more temporary foreign workers for its ridings.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am sure what the Prime Minister meant, when he was talking about just the opposite being true, was the 15% rule that at 2 o'clock the government denied the existence of and that at 4 o'clock it announced the elimination of.

It has been revealed that the Conservatives knew what was going on all along. The minister was warned by her own deputy minister, and I quote again:

...employers are hiring temporary foreign workers in the same occupation and location as Canadians who are collecting EI...

Is the Prime Minister telling us that his minister hid the information from him, or did he choose to hide that information from Canadians?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, the minister brought in changes last year to make sure people who are on EI, employment insurance, get first crack at jobs rather than temporary foreign workers. Guess who opposed that? The NDP opposed it. In fact, while we were trying to make these changes, the NDP was instead writing us, saying to bring more temporary foreign workers into high unemployment areas. That is obviously the wrong approach, which is why for over a year the government has been doing something completely different from what that party wanted to see.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister does not even care what is happening in his own province.

To quote from the same memo from the deputy minister:

...in January 2012,

—a single month—

Albertan employers received positive confirmation for 1,261 TFW (Temporary Foreign Worker) positions for food counter attendants. At the same time, nearly 350 people made a claim for EI who had cited significant experience in the same occupation and province.

Why did the immigration minister, the human resources minister and the Prime Minister all do nothing to help these unemployed Albertans?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government acted a year ago to deal with precisely that issue.

However, guess what? The leader of the NDP cannot remember, from one day to the next, what the position of his party is on these issues. It is his own party, writing the government, demanding that in the highest unemployment regions in the country we bring in more temporary foreign workers.

That is why we have been changing the EI system, why we have been changing the temporary foreign worker system and why we will keep moving Canada forward rather than listening to the NDP.

* * *

● (1425)

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the past few days, I have met with Canadians in Winnipeg, in Edmonton and up the Ottawa Valley.

The thing is that they evidently have a better understanding of our economy and the challenges we face than the government. Whether in food courts or in teachers' lounges, the message is clear, that it is only getting harder for Canadians to make ends meet.

Instead of offering real solutions in their budget, the Conservatives have loaded up a new round of wasteful government ads. How is more money spent on these ads going to help struggling middle-class Canadians?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians understand and are very proud of the fact that Canada's economy has performed so much better than other developed countries during these challenging times.

Of course the government is moving forward with additional measures to help Canadian families, which the Liberal Party is against. The Liberal Party is apparently against the adoption expense tax credit, against the first-time donor super credit, against expanding tax relief for home care services and against general tariff reductions for Canadian families.

These are important measures for Canadian families, and it is about time the Liberal Party got onside with positive measures.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, by offering a disappointing budget that raises taxes on the middle class and does nothing to help Canadians find work, the Conservatives have shown yet again that they are out of touch.

With a new round of wasteful government ads, they demonstrate once again their lack of competence in their spending.

Can the Prime Minister offer any examples of Canadians who have actually told him that they would like their tax dollars spent on more government budget ads?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what Canadians clearly have told this party in three successive general elections is that, unlike the Liberal government, we want to see taxes lowered in this country. That is why they are now \$3,000 lower for every Canadian family in this country.

We keep waiting to hear some positive and substantive ideas from the leader of the Liberal Party. In the absence of those, I would urge him to look at the important measures in the budget and, rather than defend special tax breaks for Chinese companies, actually stand on the side of Canadians here.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is becoming obvious that, rather than helping Canadians, the government would rather continue to spin Canadians.

[Translation]

Canadians have been inundated with these famous action plan ads for four years now.

When is the government going to stop wasting taxpayers' money on ads during Hockey Night in Canada?

When are Canadians going to get a real plan from this government, one that recognizes the challenges the middle class is facing and addresses their economic problems?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are very proud of Canada's economic performance during a very difficult period in the global economy.

Canadians want this government to continue to lower taxes and oppose the tax increases being proposed by the opposition parties, including the Liberal Party of Canada.

We have reduced taxes by \$3,000 per family, and we will continue to do so.

*Oral Questions***SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in their war against science, the Conservatives have decided to cut funding for Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Statistics Canada and the Experimental Lakes Area.

They recently decided to change the mandate of the NRC, which is going to have to move away from basic research. Research will now serve the needs of industry. Considering the Conservatives' priorities when it comes to industry, we have cause for concern. Worse yet, this government that is muzzling scientists is also going to tell them what to do.

Why have the Conservatives decided to cut basic research?

• (1430)

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, no such thing is happening. Actually, this is a very exciting day for Canadian innovation.

The NRC is refocusing to help Canadian businesses stand shoulder to shoulder with the world's most innovative and competitive companies. Refocusing one of our councils will help create high-quality jobs, economic growth, long-term prosperity and a better quality of life for all Canadians.

Our government has made all science a priority. We have increased funding in every single budget, and the opposition has voted against it every single time.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we will vote against their budgets every single time they cut basic science, and we will keep doing it.

I would like to remind the government that it is the National Research Council, not the commercial application council.

For the Conservatives, if research has no immediate commercial viability, they do not consider it worth doing, but the fact is that many revolutionary scientific advancements that benefit people today, such as the human genome project, started as basic scientific research.

How can the Conservatives be so short-sighted? How can they turn their backs on important research that will now go unfinished?

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are taking steps to ensure that the National Research Council remains a world-class organization that is responsive to industry and generates jobs and growth for Canadians.

Our government has a science and technology strategy. Independent studies have placed us fourth in the world because of that strategy. The NDP has no strategy. In fact when that member, the science critic, asked his party for its policy on science and technology, he was recently quoted as saying, "They showed me a big blank page".

Science is not for amateurs.

ETHICS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Liberal Senator Mac Harb and Conservative-appointed Patrick Brazeau are being forced to pay back \$130,000 they ripped off from taxpayers. Like Mike Duffy, their laughable excuse is that they could not understand how to fill out a simple housing form.

When an ordinary Canadian makes a false claim and gets money to which he or she is not entitled, the government calls it fraud.

Why is the government supporting the entitlements of their unelected, unaccountable and unethical senators? Why are there no penalties for ripping off the Canadian taxpayer?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are committed to ensuring that all expenses are appropriate and that any monies that were incorrectly claimed will be paid back.

The Senate committee will review the audit, and of course that will be released to the public shortly.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, \$130,000 in fraudulent claims is shameful, and the Conservatives need to take this situation more seriously.

On Thursday morning, the senators will hold a little meeting to decide whether they should hand over the reports on this attempted fraud to the RCMP.

Fellow senators are responsible for deciding whether a senator—Liberal or Conservative—should be charged with fraud. That is absolutely ridiculous.

The worst is that the Conservatives are not doing anything to put a stop to this theft by their cronies.

Will they send a clear message to their party friends in the Senate and hand these cases of fraud over to the RCMP as soon as possible?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our message is clear: we are committed to ensuring that all expenses are appropriate, and we expect all of the incorrectly claimed money to be reimbursed after the audit is complete.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on another subject, the Conservatives were negligent with respect to abuses of the temporary foreign worker program.

Documents released by the media show that the minister was advised almost a year ago. A year. For a year, employers were bringing in temporary foreign workers to fill positions even when qualified unemployed Canadian workers were available.

Oral Questions

Why did the government wait so long to reform the temporary foreign worker program? Why was the government so lax?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the immigration minister and I have been talking about this problem for a year now.

That is exactly why we made changes to the employment insurance system and why we are making changes to the temporary foreign worker program.

In budget 2012, changes were made to better connect employers with unemployed workers so that employers could find the workers they need and unemployed workers could find jobs. Unfortunately, the NDP voted against all of those initiatives.

•(1435)

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister will use any excuse. She will do anything she can so that she does not have to admit that she made a mistake and that the Conservatives' temporary foreign worker program was flawed.

The Minister of Human Resources received a memo on May 29, 2012, that said that hundreds of foreign workers were arriving in Alberta to work as food counter attendants, while hundreds of Albertans with similar work experience continued to be unemployed.

Why did the minister not do anything after receiving that memo?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we introduced changes to the employment insurance system and we are introducing changes to the temporary foreign worker program precisely because of such situations, which still exist.

We want to prevent such situations, which is why we introduced changes.

Meanwhile, the NDP continues to write us letters asking for temporary foreign workers in their regions and ridings where the unemployment rate is often very high. That does not make any sense.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, not a single member of the NDP asked for a Canadian to lose his job; that is what the Conservatives are doing.

[English]

Last May, the memo to the minister stated, "...employers are hiring temporary foreign workers in the same occupation and location as Canadians who are collecting EI". She ignored this memo, ignored the warnings and ignored unemployed Canadians.

Why does it always take a media scandal for Conservatives to fix the messes they create?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact we recognized this problem a year ago before that. We have been talking about it publicly since. In fact, that is exactly why we introduced changes to the employment insurance and temporary foreign workers programs. It was so that employers are now aware of unemployed who are qualified for the jobs they are trying to fill and the unemployed are now aware of the jobs that people are trying to bring in temporary foreign workers for. We connect the two. That makes sense.

However, the NDP members opposed that. Not only that, but they continue to write us asking—demanding, in fact—more temporary foreign workers in their own ridings to fill jobs, even though the unemployment rate can be in the double digits.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is the unemployed Canadians who have paid the price for Conservative mismanagement. This memo came from the deputy minister and clearly stated that temporary foreign workers were taking away Canadian jobs. While the Minister of Immigration feigned outrage at the abuse of the program, it was in fact his own colleague's inaction on the warning she received that was the real problem.

Did the immigration minister ever bring his concerns to his colleagues, and why did his government fail to act to protect jobs for Canadians over a year ago?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today's NDP is so far behind the curve it does not even know that we were citing exactly this memo and these data in speeches and interviews a year ago.

I talked about precisely this memo and precisely these data a year ago to underscore the absurdity of employers not finding local employees in regions of high unemployment but instead looking abroad for workers.

This is exactly why the government brought in the reforms to the EI system: to ensure that every effort is being made to hire unemployed Canadians before going abroad. Why did it take a year for the NDP to catch up with reality?

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, approximately two months ago, I went to see the immigration minister—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[English]

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst has the floor.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, approximately two months ago, I went to see the immigration minister. I told him that people from the Acadian peninsula wanted to go work in Alberta, but that the problem was that companies there were hiring people who did not speak French or English.

The minister told me to go and see the Minister of Human Resources, and so I told her about the problem. What did she do? Absolutely nothing.

Oral Questions

The people in my region are not slackers and they are not lazy. They want to go work but, instead, the Conservatives are bringing in temporary foreign workers to do the jobs that Canadians should be doing. It is not right.

When will the minister do her job and employ Canadians instead of foreign workers?

• (1440)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the wise words of this member and his reputation for substance and wisdom—

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism has the floor.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Mr. Speaker, they do not understand the irony.

We quoted the memo in question publicly and verbatim a year ago to highlight the need to reform the employment insurance system and the temporary foreign worker program.

I find it strange that the members from New Brunswick and regions with a high unemployment rate had asked for more temporary workers. It is strange that the NDP is saying that the program displaces workers, except in New Democratic ridings. We are fixing the problems.

* * *

[English]

PENSIONS

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite their \$1 billion ad campaign to the contrary, Conservatives have no plan for prosperity for the middle class. Instead, they repeatedly punish the middle class. Conservatives taxed income trusts, wiping out billions of dollars in retirement savings. They made old age security harder to get, and the Conservative PRPP scheme is nothing other than a joke. Seventy per cent of Canadians have no pension, yet Conservative incompetence is making it harder to retire with dignity.

Why does the Prime Minister want poverty to be part of retirement for the middle class?

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would refer the hon. member to three provinces that have just recently tabled their own legislation on pooled registered pension plans, no thanks to the opposition in the House. This is another option for Canadians to help save for their retirement. Sixty per cent of Canadians in the workforce do not now have a retirement pension plan; we think it is important to provide that option.

We would encourage the opposition, instead of fighting against that, to actually support it. Canadians want that.

[Translation]

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as soon as they were elected, the Conservatives began attacking our seniors. First, they eliminated income trusts. Then, they raised the age of eligibility for old age security from 65 to 67. Now, they are directly attacking the middle class and future retirees by eliminating the tax credit for labour-sponsored funds, which is very

popular in Quebec. Quebecers invest less in RRSPs than the average Canadian.

Why does the government have it in for Quebecers?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, we are using appropriate fiscal measures to work for all Canadian workers.

I invite my colleague to vote in favour of the budget. He will still have an opportunity in the coming days to vote in favour of the legislative measures that will enable the government to support Canadian workers and help them find jobs. As for the labour-sponsored funds, I would like to remind my colleague that \$8.8 billion was allocated to labour-sponsored funds in Quebec, in order to invest in businesses, and that amount will remain.

* * *

[English]

EMPLOYMENT

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while Canadian students are struggling to find summer work, a government report shows that the Conservatives have actually cut by 20% the number of student jobs in the federal government. Meanwhile, they are wasting tens of millions of dollars on useless TV ads during the hockey playoffs. The price of one action plan ad during the playoffs could pay for 32 student summer jobs.

Why are the Conservatives wasting so much money on bogus advertising while cutting jobs for young Canadians?

• (1445)

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we need all of the skills and talent in this country at work. That is why we are trying to help young Canadians connect with jobs. In this budget, there are 5,000 new internships through the career focus program that will help connect students who have graduated with jobs that are in demand. Unfortunately, the member and his Liberal colleagues are voting against that help.

We are also helping over 30,000 students get experience and funding for their schooling through the Canada summer job program. Once again, the Liberals are opposing all that help for young Canadians to get the experience and skills that they need.

* * *

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems that not even ill RCMP members who are wanting to speak about their experiences are safe from Conservative gag orders.

Oral Questions

A B.C. RCMP officer on stress leave was prevented from testifying at a parliamentary committee yesterday under a brand new rule that stops Mounties on sick leave from travelling without written approval from management. This comes on the heels of the minister's order banning senior Mounties from talking to MPs without prior government approval.

What is this minister afraid of? Why is he muzzling RCMP officers who want to speak out on reform of their organization?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, there was no attempt made to stop that individual from testifying.

Issues with respect to human resources and the management of the RCMP are the responsibility of the Commissioner. I do not involve myself in the day-to-day operations of the RCMP. However, we introduced the enhancing RCMP accountability act to ensure that the Commissioner has the tools to modernize the RCMP. Shockingly, the NDP, and that member specifically, voted against that act.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister must be afraid someone will contradict him. Why else would he prevent the RCMP from speaking freely to parliamentarians?

The officer in question was to testify before the Senate about Bill C-42, which, in the opinion of a number of officers and the NDP, should have been rewritten. In addition to rejecting our amendments, the Conservatives are rejecting the evidence of witnesses who might support them. So much for freedom of expression.

Need I remind the minister that it is his responsibility to listen to criticism in order to implement the best public policies and not to muzzle those who might contradict him?

[*English*]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, the officer indicated that he wanted to testify and there was nothing stopping that officer from testifying. I do not know why that member is making this up. Again, it is a type of statement that individual makes in order to ensure that their story is told.

However, I do not involve myself in the day-to-day operations of the RCMP. In fact, we introduced the enhancing RCMP accountability act to help govern the RCMP. That member voted against it.

* * *

STATISTICS CANADA

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that individual does not believe much of what that minister is saying.

[*Translation*]

Unfortunately, the RCMP is not the only organization that is being muzzled by the Conservatives.

Statistics Canada employees have also been advised to keep their opinions to themselves, even when not at work. This new code of conduct is being put in place just before we see the consequences of the Conservatives' decision to abolish the long form census. Is this mere coincidence?

In addition to being afraid of RCMP officers on sick leave, are they scared of wicked statisticians? Why muzzle Statistics Canada employees?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is completely false. The code of conduct she mentioned was written by public servants for public servants. The code does not in any way prevent employees from talking to the media or attending conferences. What the member is saying is completely false.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I guess that is another internal matter like the \$3.1 billion.

Why are Conservatives so afraid? They want to place everyone under a gag order. Even with this gag order, Statistics Canada has confirmed that the Conservatives are being reckless—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, the hon. member for Scarborough Southwest has the floor.

• (1450)

Mr. Dan Harris: Mr. Speaker, I have a quote from Statistics Canada:

We have never previously conducted a survey on the scale of the voluntary National Household Survey, nor are we aware of any other country that has.

This information is critical for schools, health care, transit and so many other services Canadians rely on. So why are Conservatives silencing Statistics Canada employees and playing reckless games with this essential data?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, Statistics Canada has already said that the national household survey will yield useful, usable information and data that will meet the needs of users.

In terms of co-operation, 2.7 million households returned the NHS questionnaire in 2011, compared to 2.3 million households in 2006.

On the code of conduct, I repeat once again, it was written by public servants for public servants.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for 25 years women and children on reserves have been without the legal protection they need. For 13 years, the Liberals did nothing, and today they put forward the absurd idea that duly elected female MPs on the Standing Committee for the Status of Women are incapable of addressing this issue.

Does the Liberal leader think these female MPs should simply not worry their pretty little heads about this? Can the Minister for Status of Women please update this House on what our government is doing to protect aboriginal women and children?

Oral Questions

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to giving aboriginal women the same rights and protection as all Canadian women. For over a quarter of a century, aboriginal women living on reserve have been without access to the legal rights they deserve. Our bill would protect thousands of women and children. In situations of family violence, it would allow judges to enforce emergency protection orders and remove a violent partner.

The truth is, emergency protection orders save lives. How the Liberal Party and NDP leaders can whip their members to block this legislation is incomprehensible to us.

* * *

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the head of Library and Archives Canada spent thousands of dollars on private Spanish lessons and another \$10,000 to renew the contract for what seems to be his hobby. Now Conservatives are cutting services and laying off workers, yet they allow this outrageous expense at Library and Archives Canada. As usual, the Conservatives only act after they get caught.

What is the minister's excuse for allowing this to happen? Will he say *adios* to this kind of waste under his watch?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, clearly this kind of spending by the head of Library and Archives Canada is outside the mandate of Library and Archives Canada, and I will be speaking to him very soon.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the category of absurd expenditures under the Conservative government, we can unfortunately include private Spanish lessons, at taxpayers' expense, for the head of Library and Archives Canada.

We are pleased to hear their remarks today because, after almost \$4,500 was spent, the contract was renewed for \$10,000 until 2014. I am sure many Canadians would have loved to be given \$15,000 for private Spanish lessons.

Why did the Minister of Canadian Heritage approve this expenditure? What will he say to Mr. Caron?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I just told his colleague from Davenport, this is not responsible spending by the head of Library and Archives Canada, and I will be speaking to him very soon.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in stark contrast to the wasteful spending at Library and Archives Canada, we are also seeing unnecessary cuts to public consultations on pipelines.

The Conservatives are so busy muzzling scientists, gutting environmental assessments and insulting anyone who does not

share their opinions that they are not doing their job: 83 Enbridge pumping stations have no emergency shut-down mechanism.

Why is the minister disobeying National Energy Board safety rules?

[English]

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, companies in Canada are obviously required to comply with the National Energy Board rules and regulations. It was an NEB audit and inspection that revealed this issue, and that is what is leading the work to solve this problem. Our government has increased pipeline inspections and audits to ensure that Canada has the safest pipeline system in the world. This has contributed to an increase in reported incidents from 2011 to 2012.

• (1455)

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have been warned time and time again that their pipeline safety oversight is totally inadequate. From reports today that Enbridge is violating safety rules at 117 out of 125 pumping stations across the country, to revelations from the environmental commissioner that the National Energy Board does not follow up on companies breaking safety rules 93% of the time, it is clear that the Conservatives have failed to make pipeline safety a priority. Will the Conservatives only act when they get caught with a disastrous spill?

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we would think that the New Democrats would stand up and say “thanks” today because it is our government that has improved pipeline safety in this country. We have a world-class regulator; they criticize the regulator. We have increased the number of inspections; they criticize that. We have doubled the number of annual audits; they are still standing up here criticizing that as well. We put forward new fines for companies that break environmental regulations; they stand up and criticize that as well.

Perhaps at some point, the New Democrats could join with us as we protect the environment and develop the resource industry across this country, which they hate.

*Oral Questions***TOURISM INDUSTRY**

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, almost one in 10 Canadian jobs are tied to tourism. Yesterday, the Canadian Tourism Commission confirmed that international visits to Canada have plunged under the Conservative government. We used to be the world's seventh most visited country. We have dropped to 18th. The government's mismanagement is costing middle-class jobs and businesses right across Canada.

Why is the government spending millions promoting its own failed economic policies to Canadians, while slashing the budget for promoting Canada to potential tourists abroad?

[Translation]

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to tell my hon. colleague that I recently had the opportunity to travel to India with the Canadian Tourism Commission. I saw Canadian exporters selling their goods to Indian buyers and inviting them to come to Canada. I can say that the number of foreign visitors, especially from India, is on the rise, as is the number of visitors from China.

We asked the Canadian Tourism Commission to focus its efforts on these emerging markets because people who come to visit Canada from those countries stay longer and spend more money visiting the wonders of Canada.

[English]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, did the minister just not hear the facts put to him? The facts of the matter are that on international tourism, Canada has dropped from 7th in visits to 18th. In terms of attractions, Parks Canada has cut staff, increased entry fees and implemented user fees. That is a negative to attracting tourism. The Canadian Tourism Commission's spending has been cut to the point that we are spending one-third what Australia does. That is also a negative to attracting tourism.

Why can the government not promote tourism in Canada?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just want to let my colleague know that the mandate of the Canadian Tourism Commission is not to promote tourism in Canada. It is to promote Canada outside our country; it is to promote our country to our visitors. That is the mandate of CTC. He must know that and it is doing that very well. The numbers are increasing. We have more visitors from abroad and I am very proud of the work done by the CTC.

[Translation]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when I asked my question yesterday about the closure of the Percé wharf, the minister did not seem to grasp the urgency of the situation.

This morning, the mayor of Percé explained the situation in his own way when he removed the barrier, reopening the wharf to pedestrians. The wharf is one of the region's key tourist attractions. Closing it condemns the entire Gaspé region.

Can the minister assure this House that the necessary work will be done in the next few days?

[English]

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I assure the member opposite that we take the safety of the users as our primary focus. As a result, we have closed access to the wharf for vehicles and pedestrians. We will continue to examine our next steps in conjunction with the local authorities.

• (1500)

[Translation]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the situation is urgent.

The minister has been aware of the wharf's state of disrepair for years now, yet he did nothing. Following a formal demand from the town and thanks to our questions here in the House and public pressure, engineers finally went to assess the condition of the Percé wharf.

Is the minister aware of the deplorable state of other wharves in the region? Will he commit to the House to no longer let federal wharves deteriorate so badly that they have to be closed? Will he commit here today to repairing the Percé wharf immediately?

[English]

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the member opposite is fully aware what the role of the small craft harbour is and our primary focus is core harbour fishing wharves. There are approximately three full-time fishermen using the harbour in Percé, about \$250,000 worth of landed value a year. The primary purpose of the wharf is for tourism.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government supports Canadian jobs from coast to coast to coast. We have a plan for jobs, growth and long-term prosperity. Our message does not change, whether we are in Canada or abroad. The leader of the NDP on the other hand, pits one region against another by referring to our natural resource sector as “a disease and a curse”.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources update the House on the work the minister is doing to promote Canada's natural resource sector?

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Westlock—St. Paul for this timely question. The Minister of Natural Resources is in Europe this week to advocate in favour of Canadian jobs and Canadian natural resources.

The Leader of the Opposition takes a very different position. He said yesterday that he agrees with the claim that our resources are a curse. First a disease, then a curse. This is a real embarrassment to all of us that the NDP never misses a chance to oppose Canadian jobs. Our government is determined to defend Canadians, Canadian jobs and Canadian communities.

*Oral Questions***LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA**

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, hell hath no fury like a librarian scorned. As we heard here earlier, he is going to have a polite conversation. I hope it is a nasty one. Mr. Caron has a track record that is not successful with librarians and archivists. He asked us in this House to invite Mr. Caron to the committee. It is not us you have to convince; it is your colleagues, your Conservative colleagues—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member knows well to address his comments through the Chair and not directly at his colleagues. He has a few seconds left to finish his question, and I hope he remembers that.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, to make matters worse, he is charging \$64 an hour to learn Spanish, to add insult to injury.

What is he going to say to Mr. Caron? When is he going to do it? Make sure it is a tough conversation. *Gracias, señor presidente.*

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have said outside this House, and I say it again in this House that spending at Library and Archives Canada must be directed at serving Canadians, not at serving oneself. I will be having that conversation with the head of Library and Archives Canada.

* * *

PENSIONS

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, back in 2010, the Minister of Finance said he believed we should consider a modest, phased-in and fully funded enhancement to defined benefits under the Canada pension plan. However, then Conservatives flip-flopped, backtracked and set arbitrary criteria for provincial consensus. The required level of provincial support already exists. Why are Conservatives adding new and blatantly unnecessary roadblocks to essential CPP and QPP expansion?

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, discussions continue between the provinces and the federal government, because it is shared jurisdiction with the Canada pension plan. Any changes made to that require consensus with the provinces. The opposition does not seem to be able to understand that.

In the meantime, we had consensus amongst all of the finance ministers to move forward with the pooled registered pension plan, and that is what we have done. Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia have all tabled their own legislation. We encourage the opposition to actually get on board and support retirement income for Canadians.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while our Conservative government is standing up for Canada's economy with Bill C-60, economic action plan 2013 act, no. 1, later today the opposition is planning to vote against it. Why are NDP and Liberal MPs saying no to more support for manufacturers, saying no to increased support for infrastructure in our cities and towns, saying no to new tax relief for parents adopting a child or for Canadians who give to a charity?

Can the Minister of Finance please update this House on the status of Bill C-60?

• (1505)

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Mississauga East—Cooksville for the question. I also ask why the NDP and Liberal MPs plan to vote against Bill C-60, the first step in implementing the economic action plan, 2013.

I am deeply disappointed that they would oppose job-creating measures to help manufacturers while denying support for vulnerable Canadians in the form of palliative care, veterans disability benefits and library services for the blind. I call on the NDP and Liberal members to—

The Speaker: The hon. member for York South—Weston.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there were four muggings of students for their phones, from one school, in my riding last week. Cellphone thefts have doubled in Toronto over the past three years, and this is a growing problem in high schools across the country. Carriers are trying to track and deactivate stolen cellphones, but they need help from Parliament. They want to make it illegal to tamper with serial numbers. My private member's Bill C-482 does exactly that.

Why are Conservatives not serious about removing the incentive to steal cellphones in the first place? Why will they not support our smart-on-crime bill?

[Translation]

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Wireless Telecommunications Association recently announced that it would work with industry to eliminate this problem, and our government supports it.

We hope the NDP will support our policies as well. As far as wireless services are concerned, we will have a fourth player across the country in order to offer affordable prices, better competition and better choices for consumers. Instead of talking out of both sides of their mouths, the NDP members are encouraged to support these measures.

* * *

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development praised social finance as a way of providing services to the public. The needs are great because the government keeps gutting its own programs and withdrawing from them.

Government Orders

The government is cutting pensions, leaving more seniors in poverty. It made cuts to employment insurance, leaving more workers, families and communities in poverty. It is cutting social housing, leaving more people without a decent place to live.

Does the minister realize that her strategy for privatizing federal government services is not fooling anyone?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely wrong. Our government wants to work with all sectors, non-profit and private alike, to develop and identify good ideas for improving life for the least fortunate, whether they are homeless or have a disability. People outside this House have good ideas, and we want to work with them and these investors who want a better Canada.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN 2013 ACT, NO. 1

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-60, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 21, 2013 and other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not want to waste precious time, so I will begin speaking about Bill C-60.

The measures set out in Bill C-60 concerning the CBC could not have come with more ironic timing. Last Friday was World Press Freedom Day.

Throughout the world, May 3 serves as a reminder of the important role a pluralistic, free, independent press plays in a democracy. However, this year also marked Canada's drop in the world press freedom index rankings. Last year, Reporters Without Borders, a respected organization, ranked us 10th. This year, Canada is ranked 20th, behind Costa Rica, Namibia, Andorra and Liechtenstein. We fell 10 spots in one year.

Reporters Without Borders mentions a number of factors to explain this astonishing drop. It noted the Government of Canada's actions, specifically the threats to the confidentiality of journalists' sources. Take note, members opposite.

The government finds itself in a serious and surprising situation. This is another brick in the wall of shame that is actively being built here in Ottawa. Our international reputation is all but destroyed. Do I need to point that out? Moreover, the government is steadily attacking the CBC day after day, which is only making matters worse.

Those attacks continue with Bill C-60, which allows the government to have a say in employees' working conditions and certain journalists' salaries. That is a shocking infringement on the public broadcaster's independence. It is clear that Bill C-60 challenges the CBC's independence, particularly its journalistic and editorial independence.

Canadians across the country have been writing to us—to me and my colleagues—for days to express their dismay and anger over the government's attempt to hijack management of the CBC. The CBC has been at arm's length from the government for nearly 80 years; it is a democratic tradition.

Liberal and Conservative prime ministers have done what they had to do throughout that time; that is, a number of governments from both parties have taken the opportunity to cut the CBC's budget, but they all have chosen to respect the independence of the public broadcaster. Governments come and go, but they do not meddle with the independence of the CBC.

Today, it is clear that it is not very difficult to tear that down. It takes an insidious bill, a bill like this one, that gives the government the right to impose collective agreements, to decide the terms of employment for non-unionized employees and the salaries of journalists, bureau chiefs and news anchors.

To date, every government had restrained itself and chosen to respect a broadcaster funded by taxpayers, yes, but accountable not to the government, but directly to the public. It is that very restraint that characterizes the conduct of democratic governments toward the public broadcasters they fund.

• (1510)

[English]

Over the last few days, hundreds of Canadians have written to me as heritage critic for the official opposition and to my colleagues. I am sure that members in the government benches across the floor have also received a lot of emails about this. Canadians are angry about this attempt to threaten the independence of the CBC. Canadians are angry about the government's attempt to end 80 years of independent public broadcasting in this country, free from interference from the government.

[Translation]

I have the feeling that people are frankly outraged that the government would dare to meddle with what is actually a democratic tradition in Canada: the healthy distance between government and public broadcaster.

It is that distance that means that a CBC journalist can report that \$3.1 billion simply disappeared from the government's books and still know that his employer will not be asking him to tone it down in the next report because the minister is twisting its arm. It is that distance that means that a news anchor can decide that such information deserves to be given to Canadians, without having to worry that the government thus tarnished might decide to interfere in his next employment contract.

Government Orders

We see that the government wants to apply the same medicine to other cultural crown corporations like the National Arts Centre, Telefilm Canada and the Canada Council for the Arts. The cultural community is speaking out against this. The Independent Media Arts Alliance, in particular, has denounced the threat to the statutory independence of the Canada Council for the Arts. In a letter to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, the alliance states that doing this is harmful to the spirit and principle of a crown corporation.

I note that these principles of independence are laid out by the Canada Council for the Arts. In its fundamental values, it states that it maintains “an arm’s length relationship from government, which allows the Council to develop policies and programs and make decisions without undue political pressure or influence”.

The Canada Council also supports “freedom of artistic expression from control or dominance by external forces such as governments and markets”, a value to be reinforced by the arm’s length relationship.

We know that these measures will have a negative effect on the delivery of the services provided by these cultural agencies and their ability to attract personnel.

Obviously, the Conservatives’ goal is to diminish the independence of these public institutions, which play important roles for creators in particular. The Conservatives seem to be exhibiting a complete lack of interest in the very concept of an independent crown corporation: the space there has to be between government, politics and crown corporations.

The leader of our party, my colleague from Outremont, summarized the problem well yesterday afternoon. When it comes to advancing its ideological agenda, the government is not the least bit bothered about interfering with independent crown corporations. For example, it tells them how to manage their employees, how to administer collective agreements, what salaries are appropriate and how many pencil sharpeners and paper clips they should buy.

However, when a problem arises in those crown corporations, the government waves the white flag and says it has nothing to do with them. When a crown corporation makes a mistake or its managers do something wrong, all of a sudden the government cannot do anything. They are independent crown corporations. That is very handy. Suddenly, the statutory independence and arm’s length status of crown corporations is back in fashion, according to the government.

But it gets worse. As members undoubtedly know, Library and Archives Canada is our national archives. It is an institution that is the guardian of our most precious historical documents and even a few artifacts from the War of 1812—for the pleasure of Library and Archives Canada. However, things are not going well over there. In the opinion of the archivists, librarians, archaeologists, historians and numerous professions that have previously been represented at Library and Archives Canada, things are even going very badly.

Acquisitions of historical documents have virtually come to a halt. There has been a full stop in document lending to other libraries, researchers and historians not based in the national capital.

Let us talk about this code of conduct imposed on the employees, professionals, experts and scientists at Library and Archives Canada, prohibiting them from attending conferences without authorization, one of several faux pas—including the one we talked about earlier—of a public institution out of control.

When we went to see the Minister of Heritage, who incidentally seemed embarrassed, and we asked him whether he was going to intervene and whether he thought, as we did, that all this was going too far, he dared answer us that Library and Archives Canada is an independent crown corporation. That is what he said in the House and subsequently in *Le Devoir*.

Once again, if a problem arises that makes them uncomfortable, they quickly hit the panic button and say it is not their fault.

In this case, however, the minister is on the wrong track because Library and Archives Canada is not at all an independent crown corporation. Not at all. According to its mandate, it is part of the federal government under the administration of the Minister of Heritage. There is nothing less independent than that, unless the minister himself fills the coffee machine.

It seems difficult for this government to grasp the concepts of crown corporation, independence from government, arm’s length and independence. They seem subtle. These crown corporations are independent. This is not complicated. For better or for worse, whether or not it pleases the government, they are constituted as entities independent of the government, in the public interest, because they must have some distance from political power.

As for the government, the Conservative Party may make a show of many principles, but I would like it to show a little consistency. Are crown corporations independent or not? They will have to make a choice.

In conclusion, apart from this budget that hurts the Canadian economy, apart from these same old solutions, as the Parliamentary Budget Officer has shown, these same old austerity measures that will slow growth and cost thousands of jobs, apart from this economic shambles and lack of vision, hundreds of people have written to us because they are concerned about the independence of their public broadcaster, the CBC.

Ian Morrison, the spokesman for Friends of Canadian Broadcasting, recalled that the difference between a public broadcaster and a state broadcaster lies in its distance from the government.

In addition, tens of thousands of signatories to petitions, including that of friends.ca, have reaffirmed their support for the independence of the CBC.

CBC management clearly questions the relevance of this government initiative. It states that its employees are neither public servants nor servants of Her Majesty, and it says it needs flexibility so that it can attract the necessary talent.

CBC unions have denounced the attack on free collective bargaining and the fact that the government is taking control, violating the Telecommunications Act and giving itself the right to intervene in the CBC’s production operations, finances and day-to-day business.

Government Orders

Like many other crown corporations, in particular cultural ones, the CBC must remain free of political interference. Public broadcasting, by its very nature, means that the broadcaster represents and speaks on behalf of our culture, not the government.

I join the legions of Canadians who are opposed to this attempt to undermine the independence of public broadcasting in this country, and I urge the government to abandon this measure.

• (1515)

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague, who does an excellent job as official opposition heritage critic.

I would like to hear him talk more about independence, about the freedom of expression that CBC/Radio-Canada has always had and that is the basis for art, culture and artistic expression in all its forms, not only in Canada, but in all democratic countries. It is so important that it is even reflected in administration. Interference is unacceptable, especially when it has to do with a corporation that represents the interests of all Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

I would like to hear my colleague talk more about how important it is for an organization like the CBC to be independent.

• (1520)

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and for being so passionate about identity issues.

He is correct. The CBC is definitely the most objective source of information for all Canadians. Unfortunately, that is what is in jeopardy here. The CBC is a crown corporation, and it objectively reports the news about different trends in the country every night. Unfortunately, that is currently in jeopardy. It cannot work any other way.

For example, if a journalist talks about an EI protest in the Magdalen Islands, he will find out the hard way that he should not have done so when the time comes to negotiate his contract with the government.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe it is important to recognize that one of the greatest expenditures we have here in Canada, especially being administered by the different provinces, is the cost of health care.

I have had numerous cards sent to me by my constituents. The message they want me to convey directly to the Prime Minister is that the federal government needs to play a stronger role when it comes to financing health care and maintaining health care standards. That is what my constituents are telling me.

When we think of the health care accord, which expires in 2014, it is absolutely critical that we have negotiations for a new health care accord if, in fact, we want to deliver the type of health care Canadians expect to see.

My question to the member is this. Does he believe that the Prime Minister is not doing his job by not meeting with the first ministers and being able to come up with the new health care accord, because of the long-term implications on federal budgets going forward?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Mr. Speaker, the Liberals and the NDP do not always agree, but I should acknowledge here that my colleague has touched on a very specific and apt point: the Prime Minister and his government have no interest in the provinces and do not want to consult them.

The Conservatives obviously believe they have all the answers regarding what should be done and what is realistic and pragmatic. As with most of the files we have been dealing with for the past few months, if not two years now, the government will impose a very narrow vision that sidesteps any consultation of the provincial premiers.

[English]

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question to my colleague is following my meeting last night with many people of the ethno-culturally diverse press as they were celebrating the 20th anniversary of World Press Freedom Day.

We learned that in the budget there are cuts after cuts, of course, but also that the government wants to control crown corporations like the CBC, which is the public broadcaster. It needs to maintain its independence in order for the press to have that freedom.

I would like my colleague to comment a little bit further, if he can, about the importance of the freedom of our press.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Mr. Speaker, I would like to extend a warm thank you to my colleague for her welcome at the start of my speech. I must say that she is very tolerant, because she was quite hidden behind a barricade.

Her question is entirely in keeping with her conscientiousness and her meeting, yesterday, with people who were concerned about journalistic freedom of expression. It is crucial.

All journalists have the right to hope for access to an objective desk and to tell stories that reflect reality as they perceive it in their work. It is extremely important and worrisome to see that it is not just on environmental issues that we look like dunces on the international scene; we look bad on this issue, too.

The bills that have been introduced recently, including Bill C-461, clearly stem from a narrow-minded vision, a relentless attack on a corporation—

• (1525)

The Speaker: Order. I have to stop the hon. member there and give the floor to the hon. member for Pontiac.

Government Orders

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Mr. Speaker, I would like to seek unanimous consent to move the following motion: That notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, clauses 228 to 232 related to the Financial Administration Act and collective bargaining between crown corporations and their employees, be removed from Bill C-60, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 21, 2013 and other measures, and do compose Bill C-62; that Bill C-62 be deemed read a first time and be printed; that the order for second reading of the said bill provide for the referral to the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates; that Bill C-60 retain the status on the order paper that it had prior to the adoption of this order; that Bill C-60 be reprinted as amended; and that the law clerk and parliamentary counsel be authorized to make any technical changes or corrections as may be necessary to give effect to this motion.

We are proposing this motion because we believe that this section of the omnibus Bill C-60 is extremely important and complex and that it must be studied carefully as a separate bill.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: There is no unanimous consent.

[*English*]

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources.

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I am speaking in the House of Commons in support of economic action plan 2013. This piece of legislation is an integral part of continuing Canada's economic success.

Economic action plan 2013 would implement constructive job growth measures. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business said:

...this is a good budget for small business. ...[the Minister of Finance] has done a solid job by remaining on course to eliminate the deficit while announcing some important measures for Canada's entrepreneurs.

This is something extremely important to the entrepreneurs in my riding of Simcoe—Grey.

[*Translation*]

The Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal said:

We welcome the government's commitment to maintain focus on a balanced budget in 2015-2016 without increasing the tax burden, while putting in place a new plan for our infrastructure and proposing measures to support innovation, research and collaboration between companies and academic institutions.

[*English*]

I would like to remind my colleagues that strengthening Canada's economic and fiscal well-being has been a top priority of our government for the last seven years. With an uncertain global economy, we remain focused on ensuring Canada offers the right environment to attract the business investment necessary to create

more and better-paying jobs, improving the standard of living of all Canadians. We do that knowing that we already have a strong economic record, one that Canadians can look to and trust as we once again face economic headwinds emanating from abroad.

[*Translation*]

Contrary to what the official opposition may believe, our economic policies to date, epitomized through Canada's economic action plan, have worked and placed Canada on the right track.

[*English*]

Margaret Thatcher once said, "Plan your work for today and every day, then work your plan." Our government's plan has provided Canada with competitive advantage for today, an advantage on which we will capitalize to ensure prosperity for tomorrow.

The facts speak for themselves. Since taking office in 2006, our government has pursued a positive agenda to make Canada's economy stronger, thus helping to create better, high-quality jobs. This has included lowering taxes over 150 times, supporting entrepreneurs and opening more markets to Canadian goods with increased trade deals.

Canada has more than recovered all of its output as well as all of the jobs lost during the recession. In fact, since July 2009, employment has increased by almost 900,000 net new jobs, the strongest job growth among the G7 countries over the recovery. Real GDP is now significantly above pre-recession levels, showing the best performance in the G7.

While it is gratifying to highlight Canada's economic strengths, we also know we cannot afford to be complacent. Today's advantages will not carry forward into tomorrow simply by good luck or good intentions. This is especially true in an all too volatile global economy. Though coming from beyond our borders, a number of external threats have had, and can have, severe consequences on the Canadian economy. Members can rest assured that the government is cognizant of these challenges and will remain focused and disciplined on the things that we can control. That is why economic action plan 2013 sets out a low-tax plan to eliminate the deficit and return to balanced budgets by 2015-16.

Economic action plan 2013 sets out a plan that I know my riding of Simcoe—Grey would benefit from this year and for years to come. Let me highlight some of its key components.

Canadians count on good, reliable, lasting infrastructure. It is important to our quality of life and strengthens our communities. That is why our government launched the building Canada plan in 2007, the largest federal infrastructure plan in our nation's history. In fact, over the last six years the federal government has supported over 43,000 infrastructure projects across the country, and this year we are going even further. We will be moving forward with a new building Canada plan.

Government Orders

One key component of that plan is an indexed gas tax fund payment. The economic action plan would allow for increases to the payments made under the fund starting in 2014-15. Payments are currently \$2 billion per year; this index would see the sum increase by \$100 million increments year over year. In Simcoe—Grey, municipalities would benefit immensely from this, with upgraded roads, bridges and rail.

• (1530)

[*Translation*]

As mentioned, this is only one component of our government's plan to provide over \$70 billion in predictable infrastructure funding for the next 10 years—the largest and longest federal investment in job-creating infrastructure in Canadian history.

[*English*]

The reality is that whether it is building better roads to reduce congestion and keep people and goods moving or building bridges that link us to each other, infrastructure is key to our nation's success.

The economy and job creation remain job number one for our Conservative government. While Canada is on the right track, today there are Canadians seeking work while Canadian businesses are looking to hire skilled workers. The Canada job grant, which is part of economic action plan 2013, is our government's newest measure to bring employers and Canadians together. Through the Canada job grant, funds from the federal government would be matched by both provinces and territories as well as employers to help ensure that Canadians get the skills required for the high-demand jobs of today.

This initiative would allow both small and large companies, such as Honda in Alliston, Munro in Essa, Creemore Springs in Creemore, Sheldon Creek Dairy in Loretto, and Hamilton Bros. in Glen Huron, to ensure that their employees have the skills they need to succeed. A shortage of skilled tradespeople could hold Canada's economy back.

With a demand for skilled workers to maintain economic growth and with Canadians still looking for work across the country, this is a priority for our Conservative government. It is taking action to help ensure that Canadians are connected to jobs and the economy so that we have the skilled tradespeople we require for economic growth and long-term prosperity.

As members know, there have been growing concerns regarding decreased water levels in the Canadian Great Lakes, in particular in my riding of Simcoe—Grey with Georgian Bay, which is bordered by the towns of Blue Mountain, Collingwood and Wasaga Beach.

The Great Lakes are not only the natural pride and joy of our local residents but are implicitly tied to the housing and property markets in the region and are important drivers of the local tourism economy in Simcoe—Grey.

Economic action plan 2013 would aid in sustaining our Great Lakes by reviewing the findings of a study requested by the International Joint Commission. Our government is working diligently to review the findings and recommendations of the International Joint Commission's work on water levels to make sure that the upper Great Lakes are a focus and have been a focus of this

government so that all Canadians can enjoy this region of the country for years to come.

Farm families are also the backbone of our country, as they are in my riding of Simcoe—Grey, whether potato growers or apple growers. This is why our Conservative government has delivered support to farmers and the agricultural sector since 2006. We have invested in Growing Forward 2, which supports innovation, competitiveness and market development for Canada's agriculture sector.

As part of economic action plan 2013, we are delivering on a number of new measures to support Canadian farmers, including increasing and indexing the lifetime capital gains exemption to \$800,000, thus making it easier for farmers to plan for their retirement and transfer their family farms to the next generation, which is something I hear about every day in my riding.

We are also helping part-time farmers by doubling the current deduction limit under the restricted farm loss income tax rates from \$9,750 to \$17,000.

This government is committed to supporting and recognizing veterans. The government is proud to honour the dedication and sacrifice of those Canadians who served our country in the First World War, the Second World War and the Korean War.

Economic action plan 2013 confirms that total investments of \$1.9 billion over seven years would be made to ensure that disabled, ill and aging veterans and their families would receive the support they need. This is something I have heard about at significant length because CFB Borden is a sizable base in my riding where we train hundreds upon hundreds of Canadians to make sure our military is strong.

Economic action plan 2013 proposes to simplify the funeral and burial program and more than double its reimbursement rate from \$3,600 to \$7,376.

• (1535)

[*Translation*]

I strongly believe that all of the initiatives I have highlighted today will greatly benefit the people of Canada, by creating a higher standard of living for Canadians today and a more prosperous nation that will continue to be a world leader tomorrow.

[*English*]

Winston Churchill once said that he was easily satisfied with the very best, and I take those words to heart.

The government and I both aim to deliver the very best to Canadians and to the people in Simcoe—Grey. Thus, I ask the members of this House to support the swift passage of this bill and to facilitate the implementation of Canada's economic action plan 2013, a bill that I know would provide the very best in economic opportunities to my constituents in Simcoe—Grey and to Canadians across the country.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-60, the one we are currently studying, will alone amend about 50 acts. Just one vote will be held in the House to pass an array of measures.

I am interested in one in particular, and I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary a question about the Investment Canada Act.

The bill provides that businesses controlled by WTO investors will see the level of investment in Canada increase to \$1 billion in three years before a review is conducted by the Minister of Industry. The bill also provides that foreign state-owned enterprises, such as Chinese companies, will not have access to this higher level.

However, that contradicts the foreign investment protection agreements, including the Canada-China agreement, which state that any enterprise, including state-owned enterprises that have a foothold, will have the same rights as Canadian enterprises.

Why is the government moving toward an amendment to the Investment Canada Act that goes against international trade agreements it wants to sign?

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, I want to be very clear. Our government is very focused on making sure that we have a broad and focused trade agenda and also that investments in Canada benefit Canadians. We have been clear on supporting free trade and moving forward on making sure that free trade opportunities exist for Canadians. The NDP and particularly the NDP leader think that the best way to deal with this is by trashing Canadians abroad; we are very focused on growing our trade agenda to make sure that individuals will invest in Canada and that Canadians feel comfortable investing abroad.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if I were a constituent of my hon. colleague from Simcoe—Grey, I would not be satisfied with her remarks about the International Joint Commission's study on the low water levels in the upper Great Lakes. They were rather vague.

If I were her constituent, I would be insisting that the government do a serious economic study to find out the economic impact of low water levels, because that would tell us how much money we are willing to invest in a solution to manage the water levels in all of the Great Lakes, water levels that are affecting my constituents on the shores of Lake Ontario as well.

Is the government willing to commit to a serious economic study of the dollar impact of low water levels on the upper Great Lakes and, indeed, the entire Great Lakes economy?

• (1540)

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my speech, it is of significant concern, and because of that significant concern, this government has acted, unlike the Liberals.

Over a whole series of years, we have seen decreased water levels, and the Liberals never acted. They never commented on this file, never even understood what was going on. Members here were involved, whether it was the member for Simcoe North, the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound or myself. We have taken action.

We are focused on this issue. Our government is focused on this file, and we are going to do great work to make sure it gets resolved.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when I listen to New Democrats opposite talk about economic policy, their economic policy can be summed up in one word: spend. That is all they propose: spend, spend, spend. Not only that, they want to create an economic climate that will not create the wealth to generate any government revenues.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague this question: does she think that a country can spend itself rich?

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, this government has been focused on tax reduction. We have reduced taxes over the course of this government over 150 times. Canadians now have over \$3,200 more in their pockets than they had prior to a Conservative government. That is very different from the approach of the NDP and very different from the approach of the Liberals when they were in government. Taxes were either increased, in the case of the Liberals, or would be increased, in the case of the NDP. We are focused on a low-tax plan to make sure Canadians can have good Canadian jobs as well as long-term prosperity.

* * *

[Translation]

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing the House that the Senate has passed the following bill, to which the concurrence of the House is desired: Bill S-17, An Act to implement conventions, protocols, agreements and a supplementary convention, concluded between Canada and Namibia, Serbia, Poland, Hong Kong, Luxembourg and Switzerland, for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes.

* * *

[English]

ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN 2013 ACT, NO. 1

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-60, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 21, 2013 and other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. Budgets are about choices. They are also about influence. The Conservatives have made their choices and they have made them on the basis of their ideology and on those lobbyists who are closest to the PMO. Let us be clear: those lobbyists are the largest and wealthiest corporations and CEOs of this country.

Government Orders

I will admit their ideology rests on a theory, a theory much flaunted by them, that of the Chicago School of Business, that of Friedman and Hayek, what has been called anarcho-capitalism. These academics created a vision for a utopian capitalist society where the role of the state was limited to ensuring the protection of its citizens. The reality is that most of the members in leadership positions on that side do not really believe in the Canadian state. They want to minimize its democratic influence on the economy, and that means austerity wherever it can be had. Do not get me wrong: the Prime Minister and his lieutenants are incrementalists to their own admission, so they are in it for the long haul, knowing that they are confronted with the fact that the vast majority of Canadians in their heart of hearts fundamentally disagree with their dog-eat-dog philosophy. Why do we think they want to rewrite history and get involved in imposing curricula on schools? It is because they want to shape the minds of future generations to their vision.

But as incrementalists, we cannot expect them to be obvious about it. Their excuse for imposing austerity on Canadians is always based on their ideological buzzwords: jobs, growth and prosperity. The common sense revolution all over again. Well the reality is that their approach makes no sense at all for creating jobs, growth and prosperity. Let us consider the facts.

Despite having chosen the path of austerity, Europe, the U.S. and the Canadian economy are not getting any better and the world economic crisis, despite a few good weeks here and there, is nowhere close to the long-term sustainable recovery and strength we have seen in the past. The Conservatives have had to contort themselves to make any sense out of this and how their pie in the sky ideology is not working. That is because their heads are trapped in a utopian, capitalist, ideological cloud. The reality is that ever since a modern free market has existed, there has always been state intervention, and in most cases it has been positive.

The Conservative approach is also based on another myth, a sacred cow so to speak, that somehow corporations invest the savings from tax cuts back into their operations, thus creating jobs, expanding the economy, and generating even bigger revenues for governments. From this perspective, governments should keep slashing corporate taxes, presumably right down to zero. If the tax cuts of recent years continue, that state of nirvana will be reached in 20 years. This is their belief and it is a belief empty of facts. In fact, the worst financial years have always been under conservative governments. Reagan and Thatcher in the 1980s, Bush and now the present Prime Minister are examples of how extreme conservative economic policies lead to greater crises in the economy, not less.

I am exaggerating right, because I am a social democrat? Well, in 2000, the combined federal-provincial tax rate was just over 42%. A decade later this figure has fallen to 28%. The Conservative government would cut it to 25% by fiscal 2013. Members can do the math.

The problem that members might be wondering about is that Conservatives have forgotten about something very simple: globalization. What the other benches do not understand is that there is no guarantee in a global market that corporations will reinvest in jobs in countries to which they have no loyalty. Members should not take it from me, here is what *The Globe and Mail* had to say about it:

Canadian companies have added tens of billions of dollars to their stockpiles of cash at a time when tax cuts are supposed to be encouraging them to plow more money into their businesses....But an analysis of Statistics Canada figures by *The Globe and Mail* reveals that the rate of investment in machinery and equipment has declined in lockstep with falling corporate tax rates over the past decade. At the same time, the analysis shows, businesses have added \$83 billion to their cash reserves since the onset of the recession in 2008.

● (1545)

However, what big corporations seem to be doing quite well is investing in themselves and in their salaries. The rate paid for a CEO is up at least 100% since the recession. Saved tax dollars are going into bigger salaries, not helping the economy or suffering Canadians.

Also large corporations are now more likely to hide this money than use it. *The Globe and Mail* reported that, "Investment in equipment and machinery has fallen to 5.5 per cent in 2010 as a share of Canada's total economic output from 6.8 per cent in 2005 and 7.7 per cent in 2000."

Buying machinery is a good thing, and expanding one's business means stimulating the economy and creating jobs. Now all of this is not to talk about the human cost, which is to drive up the rate of exploitation of the workforce. Their main tactic is to increase the proportion of profit and salary while simultaneously taking advantage of hard economic times to reduce labour costs, and we wonder why they want Canadians to be paid as little as foreign workers. Temporary foreign workers should not be making a substandard wage in the first place. Not surprisingly, the average level of unemployment among Canadian workers rose dramatically during these Conservative government golden years.

In other words, tax breaks and handouts have failed to live up to the predictions of Conservative economists and politicians. The gap between the rich and the working class is at record levels. Over 1.5 million Canadians remain unemployed, and that is just according to understated official figures.

Funding for social programs, health and education is clearly not a priority, and corporate CEOs and shareholders are laughing all the way to the bank.

Another study released on April 6 by the Canadian Centre of Policy Alternatives shows that, "After a decade of corporate tax cuts, the benefits to Canada's largest corporations are clear but the job creation payoff for Canadians hasn't materialized." The study tracked 198 companies on the S&P/TSX composite index from 2000 to 2009. Those 198 companies are making 50% more profit and paying 20% less tax than they did a decade ago, but in terms of job creation, "they did not keep up with the average growth of employment in the economy as a whole. From 2005 to 2010, the number of employed Canadians rose 6% while the number of jobs created by the companies in this study grew by only 5%."

Government Orders

We on the benches on this side of the House have a different approach, a more balanced one, which takes into consideration the needs of small and medium-sized businesses that, contrary to the lobbyists in the PMO's office, actually create the majority of jobs in this country.

No, we have a different approach, which balances the needs of small and medium-sized businesses with those of average Canadian families of the middle class and the working class.

• (1550)

[*Translation*]

Bill C-60 does not address Canadians' real concerns. Instead of adopting meaningful measures to create jobs, the Conservatives are imposing austerity measures that will stifle economic growth. Furthermore, the Conservatives' omnibus budget flouts Canadian democracy. It is an underhanded attack on this country's workers.

Bill C-60 makes changes that allow the government to direct a crown corporation to have its negotiating mandate approved by the Treasury Board in order to enter into a collective agreement with a union. These amendments affect 49 crown corporations and hundreds of employees. Under the provisions of Bill C-60, if the government directs a crown corporation to have its negotiating mandate approved by the Treasury Board, then the Treasury Board can impose whatever it wants in terms of the crown corporation's employees' working conditions. Furthermore, no crown corporation receiving such a government order will be able to reach a collective agreement without Treasury Board approval.

This government and its ministers, in an effort to rid themselves of any responsibility, have repeated over and over that crown corporations operate at arm's length from the government. However, the changes in Bill C-60 violate the fundamental principle of the operational independence of crown corporations.

The changes proposed in Bill C-60 constitute an attack on the right to free collective bargaining in Canada.

We must oppose this budget, and as official opposition Treasury Board critic, that is what I am doing. That is my duty.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his speech because it clearly exposes the NDP for what it is. NDP members may have tried to expunge the word “socialism” from their constitution, but it is quite obvious that socialism, an incredibly failed experiment, is alive and well on the other side of the House.

His trash-talking of Canadian corporations that generate wealth, profit and funding for this country is simply disgraceful. Given that he hates corporations, and given that many union pension funds are full of Canadian corporate stocks that fund the retirement of workers, would he recommend to his union friends that they sell all of their corporate stock?

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Mr. Speaker, let me set the record straight. I do not hate corporations. What I do not like is when corporations do not pay their taxes and when the Conservative government only gives tax breaks to the wealthiest of our country.

That is what I am against. If a corporation is a responsible social actor in our society, it clearly has a place.

Also, the member forgot to listen to that part of my speech where I talked about promoting small and medium-sized businesses. The member would know that the Conservatives have cut tons of taxes for large corporations in comparison to cutting them for small and medium-sized businesses.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the things I never hear the government talk about is those individuals who find themselves unemployed after working for a number of years. Thousands of jobs have been lost in our manufacturing industry over the last few years. Quite often, it is the core of the middle class who are leaving a job that has a decent salary and trying to get employment again at that same salary rate, but it is becoming more and more difficult.

Would the member comment regarding this issue not being debated enough inside the House?

• (1555)

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question. I completely agree with him, which does not always happen with this particular member. However, in this case, I think we are fully in agreement.

Unfortunately, the Conservative government has a very unbalanced approach with regard to promoting business in various sectors in this country. If we look at the amount of time that has been spent boosting up certain parts of our economy versus others, it is clear that the manufacturing industry in our country has been ignored for too long.

We need to do something about stimulating growth, and the wholesale giving of our jobs to either Chinese companies or others is just not the right approach.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague mentioned SMEs, which are the economic backbone of many regions in Canada. They are very important to regional economic activity and growth from coast to coast to coast.

He explained how important it is to keep them afloat and provide them with an economic environment that enables them to thrive. If the government violates their rights and does not allow these businesses to grow, how will we encourage new people to get involved in agriculture or culture?

Could my colleague speak more to the importance of SMEs in Canada?

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his question. He is absolutely right.

For example, in my riding of Pontiac, the vast majority of job creators are small and medium-sized businesses, especially those involved in tourism and in small boutiques in the towns.

Small and medium-sized business owners are having a hard time, and the big business model will not help them. They need a tailor-made approach. The government must take their needs into consideration and act responsibly.

Government Orders

It is unfortunate that this budget does not do that.

[English]

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we live in an extraordinary time. Canadians are consistently expressing gratitude for our economic blessings. Again and again, we hear evidence why our economy, under our Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, and this Conservative government, is truly the toast of the world. The evidence is clear: over 900,000 net new jobs since July 2009; the best debt-to-GDP ratio in the western world; and an investment climate which *Forbes* magazine calls number one in the world.

My purpose in rising today is to highlight aspects of the environment which are integral to our economic success and which figure prominently in budget 2013. I hope by the end of this debate that my colleagues will share with me the notion that the environment is the economy; a notion that goes beyond the more traditional paradigm that suggests the economy and the environment must be in balance.

I am delighted to work in a House where we have a Minister of the Environment who has worked relentlessly on improving climate change, both domestically and internationally. He has done a sector-by-sector effect of GHG assessment, recorded great accomplishments in responsible resource development, and with his predecessors has increased our parkland by over 50%. These are amazing accomplishments.

Every time we consider whether environmental and economic factors are in balance, we are suggesting that the environment and the economy are in conflict with one another. Another way to articulate this supposed polarity is that the one must make sacrifice for the other to advance. In other words, we tend wrongly to start our discussion from the notion that the economy and the environment are at war with one another.

In encouraging Canadians to rethink the economy and the environment, let us have a look at the importance of this discussion. The organization ECO Canada, a foundation which was founded in 1992 and is the country's largest online resource for environmental jobs, training and recruitment, says that some 682,000 jobs in Canada are directly related to the environment; that is, the people in those jobs spend 50% or more of their work time relating to the environment. That is a staggering number.

Today I would like to point to our budget to reset the discussion around the notion that the environment is the economy. As we perhaps discuss the quality of life of Canadians, instead of how the economy and the environment are struggling against one another, our budget in its genius brings out many ways in which this government views our economy and our environment to be interrelated and coexisting.

Starting with this, let us call it a fresh view of the interrelated environment and economy, how can we continue with policies of economic growth? How must our processes be designed to evaluate infrastructure projects that might facilitate responsible resource extraction?

Constituents of mine, as individuals and in groups, have consistently expressed their support for Canada's economic success

but have also stood for responsible environmental practices befitting of a riding which many call the most beautiful place on earth. Some of these proud Canadians include David Bromley, a world-renowned environmental engineer; the Sea to Sky Fisheries Roundtable coordinator Dave Brown; Carl Halvorson of the North Vancouver Outdoor School, based in Squamish; and Squamish First Nation Elder, Randall Lewis. Other groups and individuals who have articulated to me clearly the priority they put on fisheries habitat issues include the West Vancouver Streamkeeper group, including leaders such as John Barker and Mike Akerly, the Pacific Salmon Foundation, and the Future of Howe Sound Society.

What is in this budget for fisheries? In the past and current sessions of this Parliament, ministers of fisheries and of the environment have visited our riding and have heard directly from stakeholders, such as those of whom I just spoke. They have heard loud and clear about the importance of protecting fish habitat.

I am, therefore, especially proud to highlight two provisions in this budget which would respond directly to concerns such as those raised by these constituents.

First, Ottawa would contribute \$10 million over two years, across Canada, for partnerships with local groups on fisheries and habitat conservation measures. That is something that my colleagues and members right around this House ought to be rejoicing about. There is a direct relationship between this budget and the millions of Canadian volunteers, anglers and recreational fishers who would benefit from this excellent measure.

● (1600)

Second, the Vancouver-based Pacific Salmon Foundation would see its funding increase from about \$300,000 a year to \$1 million a year as a result of changes in how the government would allocate revenue from the sale of conservation stamps that fishermen would have to purchase when they acquire licences. The Pacific Salmon Foundation is one of the best organizations in Canada in terms of galvanizing volunteers and leveraging government funds many times over, so I am delighted that this foundation has made its voice heard in such an effective way.

Let us look at conservation and biodiversity. John Fraser is in Ottawa today. He is a former minister of fisheries and of the environment. As you know, Mr. Speaker, he is a former Speaker of the House, whose 1991 decision influenced your recent decision concerning members' statements in the House. Mr. Fraser is one of many Conservatives who have created a strong environmental legacy. Among other things, he assisted former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney in creating the acid rain treaty with the Americans to clean up our Great Lakes, and he contributed to the founding of a national park in what we now know as Haida Gwaii. Therefore, with the distinguished Mr. Fraser on Parliament Hill today, it is especially meaningful to refer to the remarkable record of this government regarding conservation and biodiversity.

Government Orders

Environment Canada's collaboration with the Nature Conservancy of Canada and other organizations has resulted in the protection of more than 354,000 hectares, including habitat for 146 species at risk. Our investments include \$10 million to safeguard the Flathead River Valley in British Columbia. Since 2006, the Government of Canada has added 148,754 square kilometres to Parks Canada's network of protected areas, which is a tremendous accomplishment for this Minister of the Environment and his predecessors. As a result, we have increased the total land and water that comes under our stewardship by more than half. The government's investment of \$143 million over 10 years to create Canada's first national urban park in the Rouge Valley of Toronto is a fine example of action. John Fraser will be happy to hear that we are carrying on his great environmental legacy.

What would be in the budget for the environment generally? Well, environmental concerns in B.C. would focus heavily on tanker safety, and Canada is a world-class regulator with an almost unblemished record of tanker safety on the west coast. The Government of Canada would take further action to ensure it continues this world-class tanker safety system for shipping oil and liquefied natural gas safely through Canada's waterways before any major new energy export facilities become operational. New measures would strengthen Canada's current system, including increased tanker inspections, new and modified aids to navigation, and the establishment of a Canadian Coast Guard incident command system, which would allow it to respond more effectively to an incident and integrate its operations with key partners. The government has also introduced the safeguarding Canada's seas and skies act, and a new expert panel to review Canada's current tanker safety and proposed measures to strengthen it.

With the new Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, we would provide greater certainty for industry at the same time as increasing penalties in order to ensure compliance. This would allow our natural resources to be developed in a responsible and timely way. We would work to ensure accountability and transparency from industry by conducting a review of industry reporting through the national pollutant release inventory.

These are other concrete examples of Canada strengthening its environmental protection, and there is more. The National Energy Board inspections of oil and gas pipelines would increase by 50% annually to improve pipeline safety across Canada. Canada would double the number of comprehensive audits of oil and gas pipelines to identify potential safety issues before they occur. New enforceable environmental assessment decision statements would ensure that proponents of resource and other economic projects would comply with required mitigation measures to protect the environment. New administrative monitoring penalties would be introduced for violations to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, the Nuclear Safety and Control Act and the National Energy Board Act to help ensure compliance. Companies that violate Canada's environmental laws would now face strong, stiff, new financial penalties.

If members agree with me that the environment is the economy, they will note what the next provision means in terms of its distinctiveness from the previous Liberal approach on the environ-

ment which focused on endless debate, vague objectives and unenforceable provisions.

• (1605)

In contrast to that previous Liberal approach, budgets of this Conservative government have created a \$1.5 billion trust fund to help provinces and territories invest in major projects that clean our air and result in real GHG emission reductions.

This government is committed to reducing Canada's total GHG emissions by 17%, from 2005 levels, by 2020, and is halfway to meeting its target, a target that is inscribed in the Copenhagen accord. That is concrete and measurable evidence of progress on the environment.

The government is also following a sector-by-sector regulatory approach to align with the United States to achieve GHG emission reductions. To date, stringent regulations to reduce GHG emissions in the electricity and transport sectors have been implemented. In addition, work is also under way to develop regulations for the oil and gas sector.

Our environmental approach is comprehensive and will continue to include actions that create a cleaner healthier environment, improve the lives of Canadians, and support the development and deployment of new environmental and cleaner energy technologies.

Let us look at a bit more of our history. To maintain a strong economy, Canada requires a healthy environment that provides sustainable resources and supports a high quality of life. That is why our government is committed to ensuring that Canada's enviable and pristine environment, never better evidenced than in the riding I represent, is protected and strengthened for current and future generations.

In conclusion, our government listens to stakeholders and is convinced that the environment is the economy and that we are acting in measurable ways to protect it. Secondly, our government is protecting our fisheries. Thirdly, our government is making improvements on environmental protection in a practical and measurable way that allows for responsible resource development.

• (1610)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a question about securities.

The Supreme Court ruled that creating a national securities regulator would infringe on provincial jurisdiction. Therefore, according to the Constitution, securities regulation falls to the provinces.

Government Orders

Why is the government choosing to go against the Supreme Court decision? Why does the budget include measures to continue working towards a national securities regulator when the government knows that the provinces are opposed to the idea and have jurisdiction over securities regulation? Why does this government not respect provincial jurisdictions?

Mr. John Weston: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for her question.

She was correct to emphasize the co-operation between various levels of government. Our minister and our government respect the division of powers between the levels of government, but it is crucial that we work together. That is why we are developing air quality legislation, for example. As parliamentarians, we must listen to the needs of our constituents.

That is why our budget so closely reflects our country's needs. We are listening to the needs of the provinces and, more importantly, the needs of Canadians.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am also well acquainted with the superb environmental record of former Speaker John Fraser and his exemplary efforts to stop the destruction of environmental laws through Bill C-38. He signed a letter with three other former ministers of fisheries decrying that the current approach of this administration is to destroy environmental laws, pushing back the protection of fish habitat.

As much as I think the world of the member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, he could not be more wrong about what his administration and his party are doing to environmental laws in this country. It is absolutely abominable to see CEAA destroyed, the Fisheries Act weakened and, by the way, the measures that he has described as being positive are not included in the bill we are discussing today.

Mr. John Weston: Mr. Speaker, I believe we have a great contributor to the debate in the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands. Certainly, she exemplifies the importance of our government listening.

Mr. Fraser certainly has been involved in that debate and always will be, as long as he has a breath to breathe. He has provided some very good constructive criticism for our government.

I want to give great credit to our Minister of the Environment and our Minister of Finance for the way they have listened. That is why we have such ingenious provisions in the budget. They are provisions that reflect the needs of Canadians, provisions that, for instance, invest \$10 million in partnerships with groups across Canada. They are the engines in the protection of habitat. They galvanize volunteers. They understand the on-the-ground needs of the fish and the habitat.

Our government will be standing with those people across Canada as we protect our habitat and produce an environment that is not only as good as but is better than the one we inherited.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a quick question. The government will spend \$95,000 in tax dollars for a 30-second ad during a hockey game, or something of this nature.

In Winnipeg North, about \$300,000 in government money would allow for 60 summer jobs for students. Three ads would have covered the cost of that program. Does the member believe that Canadians would rather see the Government of Canada invest in student summer jobs or in the propaganda in the television promo ads it is running on the economic action plan?

• (1615)

Mr. John Weston: Mr. Speaker, it would be far more credible if my colleague, whom I admire greatly for his intellect and his rhetoric, occasionally offered support for the government for measures such as accountability and transparency, which he is referring to now.

Which government brought in the most sweeping accountability provisions in Canadian history? Which government puts its focus on transparency every day in its operations? It is our Conservative government. It is hard to take an out-of-context criticism of one particular thing when the member is consistently on his feet voting against the provisions we are talking about today: a budget and environmental measures that are bound to pull us forward into a cleaner and healthier environment.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of rising in the House today to speak to Bill C-60 on behalf of my constituents in Berthier—Maskinongé, who are opposed to this new omnibus bill.

In my opinion, the short title of this bill, Economic Action Plan 2013 Act, No. 1, is not really appropriate.

After reading through this bill, I am once again disappointed to see that there is nothing in it that will bring about economic recovery or create jobs or make life more affordable for Canadians. On the contrary, the Conservatives have raised taxes on a number of consumer goods.

Budget 2013 is full of tax increases on hospital parking, safety deposit boxes, labour-sponsored investment funds, bicycles and baby buggies. These increases even affected hockey helmets, until my colleague from Sudbury pointed that out and the government had to cancel the increases on hockey helmets and sports equipment.

These tax increases will cost Canadians \$8 billion over the next five years. This budget will not just raise the cost of living. It will also slow economic growth.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer analyzed the economic situation and the bills brought in by this government. She found that budget 2012, the 2012 update and budget 2013 will result in the loss of 67,000 jobs by 2017 and will cause a 0.57% decline in the GDP. I do not need to say that this is not a good thing for our country's economic growth.

With wages stagnating, uncertain jobs and families heavily in debt, the Conservatives are proposing austerity measures that add to the cost of living for Canadian families and stifle economic growth.

Government Orders

This bill contains a number of complex measures that deserve to be considered and examined carefully. For the third time in their current term, however, the Conservatives are proposing to evade the oversight of parliamentarians and the public. I find this insulting on several levels. We are here to examine bills. When the government imposes gag orders, we cannot do our job.

This bill contains changes to the temporary foreign worker program. The Conservatives are proposing to close major loopholes by giving the department the last word when work permits or opinions about a permit application become a source of political embarrassment. That does not solve the main problem, which is the mismanagement of the temporary foreign worker program by the present government.

I have received many emails from the people of Berthier—Maskinongé criticizing the changes in Bill C-60 that enable the government to compel a crown corporation to have its negotiating mandate approved by the Treasury Board so that it can reach a collective agreement with a union, particularly in the case of the CBC.

The people of Berthier—Maskinongé do not want to see any politician exercise that kind of control over our national public broadcaster. The changes proposed in Bill C-60 constitute an all-out attack on the right to free collective bargaining in Canada.

The NDP opposes Bill C-60 based on its content, but also on the process used. With so little time to study of the bill, members cannot consider its consequences. Once again, the Conservatives are trying to keep Canadians in the dark, and it is Canadians who will ultimately pay the price.

Today I would like to focus on a few specific aspects of the bill. I have noticed a truly disturbing trend in this government's legislative program.

Several changes made recently show how little the Conservatives know about the need for a long-term strategy for our regions. I am thinking in particular of the elimination of the labour-sponsored funds tax credit, the employment insurance reform and the cuts to all services.

One important measure that has drawn my attention is the cancellation of the labour-sponsored funds tax credit in this last budget. The government has announced the phasing-out of the 15% tax credit it grants for shareholders of labour-sponsored funds.

• (1620)

This decision is a serious mistake and shows that the Conservatives understand nothing about Quebec's economic model and the role these funds play in the province and, of course, in the economies of the rural regions.

Ninety per cent of the amounts that Ottawa wants to recover with this measure will come from Quebec savers and investors, since virtually all of these funds are in Quebec. This decision will mainly affect the middle class and its ability to save for retirement, in addition to depriving Quebec SMEs of significant support for their development.

Once again, the government has turned a deaf ear, just as it did on the employment insurance reform. On April 27, thousands of people from several Quebec regions demonstrated in downtown Montreal against the Conservative government's butchering of employment insurance.

This reform is a serious attack on the most vulnerable workers in our society, most of whom are women. It will also affect families and regions. Once again, despite the demonstration, the Conservatives are not listening to Canadians, and I find that truly sad and deplorable, particularly when I see families and workers trying hard to make ends meet.

This reform strikes a hard blow to the economic health of our regions. In my riding, thousands of people hold seasonal jobs. A large segment of the economy depends on seasonal work, including farming, tourism, construction and forestry. The list is long.

Employment insurance reform will have disastrous consequences for a number of regions. The Conservatives did not assess the impact of such a reform. They are refusing to listen to the protestors who are calling on the government to back down. I am also wondering what happened to their 2011 campaign slogan, "Our region in power". I have the impression that their slogan should now be "The regions—who cares?"

Why not try to create real jobs and support local initiatives? In short, I am talking about this reform to remind the government that it is a real disaster. As if that were not enough, the government is adding insult to injury with the labour-supported funds.

Another important aspect of the bill is the elimination of the supplementary tax credit for credit unions. Our credit unions play a vital role in our rural communities. Last year, I had the honour of being on the Special Committee on Co-operatives, where my Conservative and Liberal colleagues and I heard testimony that shed light on the remarkable work co-operatives do in our communities.

Perhaps some members were more attentive than others, because I now see that the supplementary tax credit for co-operatives will be eliminated. That will seriously limit the ability of credit unions to compete with large banks, when what the banking sector needs is more competition.

Last year, the Conservatives put an end to the co-operative development initiative and made cuts to the rural secretariat. Now, it is the co-operatives' turn. Do the Conservatives not understand that these changes are going to hit our rural regions hard, both in Quebec and in the rest of the country?

Tabling a budget means making choices. The budget implementation bill shows that the Conservatives are choosing not to support families, workers or our young people. Last year, when we debated the budget 2012 implementation bills—Bills C-38 and C-45—many of my New Democrat colleagues, as well as economic analysts, warned us that we would not have time to understand everything the omnibus bills contained and that the long-term impact would be felt for years to come.

We are finding out the implications of those bills again today, and I am afraid the same thing will happen with Bill C-60. Our children will be the ones to feel the effects of the Conservatives' misguided policies, when they are longer be around to be accountable. I hope they will be willing to listen to our concerns and make the required changes.

• (1625)

[English]

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that the NDP economic model is basically the Greek economic model, and that model put Greece in terrible difficulty. Only by adopting the policies of the Canadian Conservative government is Greece finally starting to work its way out of the terrible place it was in.

As I said in my previous comments, the NDP's proposals for all economic action is to spend, spend, spend. Does my hon. colleague think a country can spend itself rich?

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Mr. Speaker, this is a question we hear quite often from the government, and the member posed it recently.

As I said in my speech, a budget is about choices. It is about being responsible. There are 1.4 million Canadians who are unemployed. When I see the youth of my generation not being able to find jobs out of college and being so heavily indebted, these are not good choices. In my riding, there are a lot of small and medium-sized businesses. I do not see any measures in this budget that would help people or businesses in my riding. That is why I am voting against a budget like this.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on the member's comments with regard to credit unions. This is something Liberals have raised in question period and in speeches to try to draw more attention. The government asks what it can do to improve things in the budget, and this is just one of many things it could do.

Let us recognize the important role credit unions play, in particular, in smaller communities that do not have access to banking. Another way of looking at it is that smaller credit unions provide a great deal of competition, thereby ensuring that there are at least better service fees. Fees are still far too high within the banking industry or the financial industry as a whole, but the bottom line is that there is healthy competition when there are enriched credit unions. Credit unions play a phenomenal role in providing support for many of the regions that are not getting the type of support they could get from the banking industry.

I wonder if the member would like to expand upon her comments with regard to just how important those tax credits were for that industry.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Mr. Speaker, co-operatives and credit unions are very important. They are also very democratic. It is member based, and members take care of each other. In my riding, there are quite a few co-ops, and as a result of what I learned after having been on the special committee for co-operatives, I know they are based out of a need. They come together and create jobs. They are democratic and give back to the community. When credit unions make money, they do not get rich or give bonuses to the higher ups, they give back to the community. That is something we need to

Government Orders

encourage. This is a good measure and a step in the right direction to keep this credit. It is a simple step.

[Translation]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé gave an excellent speech. She clearly articulated the kinds of investments our rural municipalities need for their economic growth.

She talked about choices, and she is right. Budgets are all about making choices. Consider infrastructure investments for just a moment. The government is simply playing with numbers. Initially, the money was spread over seven years; now it is over 10 years. If we do the math, after 10 years, less money will have been invested annually than originally planned.

The government is playing with numbers. Does that sound like the actions of a good manager?

• (1630)

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

When I visit the mayors in my riding, which is made up of 34 municipalities, they often tell me they need money for infrastructure. When the government announced that there would be plenty of money for infrastructure, it was playing games.

Clearly, \$4.7 billion is less money than what has been allocated in previous years, and yet investing in infrastructure creates jobs, meets genuine needs and constitutes a positive measure.

The government says it is investing more, but that is merely propaganda. It is simply not true.

* * *

SITUATION IN SYRIA

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations amongst the parties and if you seek it I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, during the debate tonight pursuant to Standing Order 52, no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent shall be received by the Chair.

The Speaker: Does the hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Government Orders

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[English]

SAFE DRINKING WATER FOR FIRST NATIONS ACT

BILL S-8—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the safe drinking water for first nations act would allow our government, in co-operation with first nations, to ensure safe access to drinking water and to ensure the effective treatment of waste water and the protection of sources of drinking water on first nation lands.

However, I would like to advise that an agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the second reading stage of Bill S-8, an act respecting the safety of drinking water on first nation lands.

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 the proceedings at the said stage.

* * *

BILL C-60—ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN 2013 ACT, NO. 1

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-60, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 21, 2013 and other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Minister of Finance for once again introducing a budget that would put us on track for jobs, growth and long-term prosperity.

Low taxes are an integral part of our budget, and we are on track to balance the budget by 2015-2016. Economic action plan 2013 would announce more savings in government spending, totalling \$2 billion by 2015-2016. We would implement a number of very important measures here.

I would also like to talk about how our economic action plan would help Manitoba, and indeed all the provinces of Canada, manage the important infrastructure demands and services to Canadians that are so important to our country's economic well-being. Federal support to the provinces has reached historic levels of \$62 billion. Federal support to Manitoba is at an all-time high of \$3.4 billion, up 21% from under the previous Liberal government.

Indeed, the total Manitoba provincial budget is funded 40% by the federal government, and it is still raising taxes. Our Conservative government has done this while keeping taxes low and maintaining the transfers. Unlike the high-taxing NDP and Liberals, our Conservative government believes in low taxes and leaving more money where it belongs: in the pockets of hard-working Canadian families and job-creating businesses.

Since 2006, we have cut taxes more than 150 times, reducing the overall tax burden to its lowest level in 50 years. While the NDP opposite thinks governments can spend money better than citizens, it

is our firm belief that citizens should spend as much of their own money as possible.

We have cut taxes in every way the government collects them, including personal taxes, consumption taxes, businesses taxes, excise taxes and much more. This has meant savings of more than \$3,000 per year to the average family of four. We have done all this while maintaining the transfers to the provinces.

We stand in stark contrast to the NDP Government of Manitoba and its NDP colleagues in Ottawa. The Manitoba NDP is now raising the provincial sales tax to 8% to pay for its years of fiscal recklessness. Its federal leader in the House wants to create a carbon tax to generate another \$21 billion for further irresponsible spending.

Manitobans and Canadians are quickly coming to realize that the tax and spend ways of the NDP are not sustainable. To repeat an important point, one simply cannot spend oneself rich.

We can see the difference in approaches when we look at Manitoba versus Saskatchewan. A two-income family of four earning \$60,000 in Saskatchewan will pay an estimated \$1,593 to its provincial government in income taxes, PST and the gas tax. The same family in Manitoba earning \$60,000 will pay a mind-boggling \$4,525 in taxes to the Manitoba NDP government.

Our Conservative government has taken the alternate path for the past seven years. We have paid down \$37 billion of the debt. Our fiscal responsibility and aggressive debt reduction have placed Canada in the very best possible position to weather the global recession. This is something the NDP simply does not understand.

It is in our country's best interests to have a strong fiscal position to weather any downturns that may occur. While other countries continue to struggle with debt that is spiralling out of control, Canada is in the best fiscal position in the G7. Our net debt to GDP ratio is 35.8%, the lowest level among G7 countries.

While the NDP and Liberals want to engage in reckless spending, our Conservative government is on track to return to balanced budgets in 2015-2016. That plan is working. Indeed, in the last two years, we have cut the deficit by more than half.

Budget 2013 would build on these efforts to reduce government spending, by announcing an additional \$1.7 billion in ongoing savings. Overall, measures taken by this government since budget 2010 would result in total ongoing savings of roughly \$14 billion. Unlike the parties opposite, the Liberals and the NDP, and I assume the Greens, our Conservative government will not raise taxes on Canadians to balance the budget.

Government Orders

What are the benefits to my home province of Manitoba? We have the Canada jobs grant to help more Canadians find high-quality and well-paying jobs. We have tax breaks for manufacturers who buy new machinery, and an extended hiring credit for small businesses. There is a record \$70 billion of federal investment into infrastructure across Canada over the last few years.

• (1635)

There are major investments in research and technology and new tax relief for Canadians who give to charities, adopt a child or rely on home care services. Import tax tariffs have been eliminated on many everyday items that Canadian families buy.

Economic action plan 2013 also confirmed the Conservative government's continued all-time record support for hospitals, schools and other important health and social services. In 2013, the federal transfer support to Manitoba is planned to be \$643 million higher than under the former Liberal government.

My province tends to flood from time to time, given our geographic location; our government has also delivered \$100 million in advance payments to the Province of Manitoba for the flood of 2011 under the Disaster Financial Assistance Act. It is estimated that once all the costs have been tallied, the federal government's share will be close to \$500 million under the DFAA. Our Conservative government has gone beyond that by announcing another \$99 million for flood mitigation across Canada in 2012 to help prevent future damage to infrastructure, homes and farms.

In terms of agriculture, we are doubling the current deduction limit under the restricted farm loss income tax rules from \$8,700 to over \$17,500. This is of huge benefit to many young producers and farm families when some members work off the farm and may have built up farm losses.

We are increasing the lifetime capital gains exemption to \$800,000 from \$750,000. This would make it easier for our Canadian farmers to plan for their retirement and transfer family farms to the next generation.

We are investing \$165 million in Genome Canada, which has developed new technologies for the agricultural sector.

In terms of environmental initiative, I would like to compliment my colleague from West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country. He listed some of the incredible environmental initiatives that our government has undertaken. As the chair of the Conservative hunting and angling caucus, I am proud of the \$10 million that has been announced for work on fisheries conservation projects in partnership with local fisheries conservation groups. This is something that our hunting and angling caucus has asked for, and it would create tremendous environmental benefits across the country. As a fisheries biologist myself, I can say that this program will do wonders for our recreational fisheries.

I would note, contrary to what the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands said, that these kinds of partnerships are now allowed under the new Fisheries Act, and we will see clear, delivered conservation benefits because of our new Fisheries Act. In terms of the environment, that is the difference between this side of the House and the other parties opposite. The Conservative environmental

policy generates real, measurable environmental results on the ground; the other side just talks.

We have supported clean technologies. The Nature Conservancy of Canada would receive \$20 million for the acquisition of very important lands across the country. We want to make sure that the superb work of such groups as the Nature Conservancy of Canada, Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Delta Waterfowl Foundation is recognized.

I would also note that under the previous Liberal government, greenhouse gas emissions increased by a staggering 30%. We were the first government in Canadian history to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

I would also like to point out that there is a clear relationship between how wealthy a country is and how well it does in terms of environmental protection. That is why environmental quality in free market, democratic, capitalist countries is immeasurably better than in socialist countries. Socialist left-wing governments may talk about the environment or not, but the end result is a trashing of it.

As a country gets richer, it invests more in environmental protection and generates more and better environmental results. That is why, under the economic policies of this government that allow our economy and our wealth to grow, we will see measurable environmental improvement under this government for many years to come.

• (1640)

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I can see that my colleague on the other side of the House has learned his Conservative catechism very well. He can probably recite the formula perfectly. The problem is the formula just does not work. There are as many unemployed now as there were before the recession.

What the member fails to recognize is that the litmus test for any economic policy is the creation of jobs. Where are the jobs?

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure where my friend has been, but one of the most common complaints of the business community is that we have lots of jobs but not enough workers to fill them. That is why the Canada job grant is so important. It matches what employers need with the skills that potential workers have. The Canada job grant program will allow Canadian workers to acquire the skills that employers need.

I would also point out that Canada's economic record is the best among the G7 countries by far. Our Conservative environmental and economic track records speak for themselves.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what my Conservative colleagues say about taxes is just plain wrong.

Government Orders

Earlier today the Prime Minister claimed, as have other members on the Conservative side, that every family of four would save \$3,000 a year in taxes. It turns out that the family that saves \$3,000 in taxes is a family of four with two working parents making an income of \$100,000. I do not know about others, but that is way above the median income in my riding. Furthermore, the share of the national debt of that family of four has increased by \$16,000 in the last five years, so those tax savings are totally illusory.

Furthermore, the member for Toronto Centre told us last week that the Conservative government is actually increasing overall taxes. The member for Toronto Centre told us that in March 2010 the government voted to raise taxes by \$720 million. In April 2012, the government voted to raise taxes by \$3.6 billion. In March of this year the Conservatives voted to raise taxes by \$3 billion.

Many falsehoods are being claimed by the Conservatives as they cross the country trying to sell this budget.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure about the question there, but as I have the floor again, I want to reiterate the importance of creating a climate for business and economic growth.

Public policy matters. Letting Canadian entrepreneurs and Canadian businesses go about their jobs of creating wealth will make our country strong, generate income for vital social programs, fund retirement benefits for seniors and make our country better overall to withstand any economic perturbations that may happen in the future.

•(1645)

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-60, an act to implement certain measures contained in the budget presented in the House on March 21, 2013, by our very capable Minister of Finance.

The bill is about continuing the important work—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kyle Seeback): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member for Mississauga—Streetsville, but we are still on questions and comments. I apologize. I thought you rose to ask a question.

The member for Saanich—Gulf Islands has about 40 seconds for a quick question.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member referred to the criticisms from this side of the House about what the current Conservative administration is doing to environmental laws. I want to put to him, as I did to the member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, that he must bear in mind that both John Fraser and Tom Siddon were Progressive Conservative ministers of fisheries who very strongly criticized the destruction of the Fisheries Act in Bill C-38. The changes in Bill C-38 will not create better fisheries management or protection of habitat, and although it is great to see a small amount of money going to small NGOs through conservation partnerships, it is woefully inadequate, given the cuts to science and habitat protection.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, I am a very strong supporter of the changes we made to the Fisheries Act and to environmental laws.

What we did was eliminate needless duplication. What my hon. friend and members across the way do not appreciate is that project

proponents and businesses today build the very best environmental standards into the design of their projects from day one. Environmental processes had little to do with that. Our environment will continue to improve under the new environmental laws that this government has put in. The member can take that to the bank.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and I believe that, if you were to seek it, you would find unanimous consent for the following motion: That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, Bill C-413, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (judicial discretion), and Bill C-414, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (cruelty to animals), be withdrawn from the Order Paper.

[*English*]

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Yes.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in anticipation of my colleague's speech, which I look forward to and will stick around for, I want to talk about this particular budget implementation bill. It is a little smaller than what we are used to. I think it was my mother who said, years ago, when it came to my being her son, "It is a little smaller than what we are used to."

However, there is something about this particular budget that continues the narrative, the theme, of not so much what is in it but what is also not in it in terms of the Canadian narrative of compassion, of a great place to be, of the nation where we choose to bring up our children. We think this is the greatest nation in the world, obviously, and we truly believe that this particular budget is not in keeping with the spirit of our nation in many respects.

I want to give the House a quick example of what I am talking about. It is one of the things we are talking about when it comes to this budget implementation bill.

Mr. Speaker, there seems to be some confusion on the other side of the House. I do not know if they want to settle it, or perhaps—

•(1650)

The Speaker: Is it a bit noisy for the hon. member? I hope the hon. member remembers this tomorrow during question period.

Government Orders

I will just ask members in the back on the government side to take their conversations out of the chamber so that the hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor can be heard.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, I accept your comment with the utmost humility, as you are quite right.

I talked about the narrative of this nation and how in many respects, the bill is not in keeping with it. I am the heritage critic. There are many aspects of heritage I have seen over the past year and a half that have caused great trouble. One in particular is with regard to Library and Archives Canada. I have a paper sent to me from a gentleman by the name of Jim Clifford. He is involved with ActiveHistory.ca, and he brings up some very salient points:

Library and Archives Canada also experienced a wave of job losses last summer with the termination of twenty-one archivists and archival assistant positions, a fifty per cent reduction in digitization and circulation staff, and the elimination of the interlibrary loans program. The cuts compounded past reductions in the LAC budget and the series of “modernization” policies that have reduced public access to archival materials and compromised the ability of LAC to acquire new records.

This is a legitimate concern, because instead of saying that we are going to pare down the budget, look at a substantial review, look at practices within certain departments that are inefficient and eliminate them or put them on hold until a later date when we can afford them, the Conservatives, like many governments nowadays, are saying that they are going to make these cuts, and it will be better for them. They will give them less food, but they will feel more full. Where is the logic in that?

Library and Archives Canada is a good example. They claim that it will be that much more efficient and that much better for the end-user, in this case, anyone who wants to find out about the history of this country and the story behind who we are. They are going to have trouble doing that. There is less service.

Parks Canada land across this country, millions of square kilometres, are some of the greatest places in this country to experience what it is to be from this country, whether it is the mountains of the west coast, Wood Buffalo National Park and the sensational scenery there, Ontario, or even the national park where I am from, which is Terra Nova National Park. Parks Canada was hit the hardest by layoffs in the civil service as a result of last year's budget. It was \$29 million annually, resulting in an estimated 638 job losses. This is quite a hit to take.

What we expect from this particular implementation bill and other bills that follow is the transparency to say that this is how we are going to pare down these services. What the Conservatives do not do is to seek the advice of those who are involved in day-to-day operations, as illustrated by Library and Archives Canada and Parks Canada. Now we see, paramount to a lot of things in Bill C-60, that it also contains this measure.

I received correspondence from the Independent Media Arts Alliance about the presence of the Treasury Board in negotiations in crown agencies. Here is what it says:

The arm's length relationship is so fundamentally important to the Canadian Council for the Arts and other institutions.... It greatly undermines the spirit and principle of the crown corporation, which while having a direct connection to the federal government is meant to be “shielded from constant government intervention and legislative oversight and thus generally enjoys greater freedom from direct political control than government departments”.

There we see a fundamental difference. Fittingly, over the past six to eight years, we brought to the Conservatives problems with certain crown agencies. The answer was always that they had no direct control. What does this mean now? If something happens with a crown agency, can we say that this is not true any more, because they have direct control over certain aspects? We are now telling Treasury Board that it must get involved in these collective agreements. That is step one. What is next?

● (1655)

Will the mandate of the CRTC also be controlled from the PMO or other sources? This is our fear. I think many Canadians understand that this is a fundamental step backward, certainly over the past four or five years. This particular government does not want to involve itself, yet it does. It is trying to play this side and that side of the story.

Budget 2013 imposes a net tax increase of \$3.3 billion in the next five years. One of my hon. colleagues across the way said in the House about two years ago that a tax is a tax. It could be a fee. It could be an adjustment in how we pay fees in this country. No matter what it is, if the government raises the amount of money extracted from the general public, it is a tax.

Some were talking about the so-called iPod tax. Interestingly, with the change recently in tariff regulations, we find that the price of iPods and other items like that are going up. To quote my hon. friend in the Conservative Party, a tax is a tax is a tax. Who is doing the iPod tax?

This is the iPod shuffle. There are many other shuffles we continue to deal with in the House. They appear in the fine print. Over the past three years, budget implementation legislation has always contained fine print that we talk about in the House.

It was the same with EI changes. We did not realize there were changes until people called my office and said that they had to take a job that was an hour's drive away. A woman who lived in St. John's told me that she was told that she would have to go to Clarendville. Here was the catch. After taking a ferry for 30 minutes, she would have to drive three and a half hours to get there.

If people have problems with employment insurance, they have the right to appeal. The umpires and the appeals process are being cut. It is being pared down to the bare minimum, which will also make it extremely difficult for these people.

I started by saying that \$3.3 billion in the next five years will be an incremental increase. There are safety deposit boxes; dividend tax credits; the deduction for credit unions, which will be crippling for many rural towns' financing; tariff increases; the general preferential tariff, which I spoke about earlier, which is the new iPod tax; character conversion transactions; trust loan trading; mining expenses; life insurance arrangements. The total increase is \$5.5 billion.

Government Orders

It is rather disingenuous when the Conservatives put out the same line over and over again. They keep saying that it is their low-tax plan. At some point, people will say, and certainly in my riding they are saying it, that they are not buying that any more.

In this particular instance, when it comes to Bill C-60, some things are positive, but by and large, most things are negative, and therefore I will not be voting for this particular piece of legislation.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

CRIMINAL CODE

(Bill C-413. On the Order: Private Members' Business:)

Second reading and reference to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights of Bill C-413, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (judicial discretion) — Mr. Joe Comartin.

(Bill C-414. On the Order: Private Members' Business:)

Second reading and reference to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights of Bill C-414, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (cruelty to animals) — Mr. Joe Comartin.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and I believe that, if you were to seek it, you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, Bill C-413, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (judicial discretion) and Bill C-414, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (cruelty to animals), be withdrawn from the Order Paper.

• (1700)

[English]

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Order discharged and bills withdrawn)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN 2013 ACT, NO. 1

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-60, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 21, 2013 and other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my hon. colleague's speech. I did not hear him talk about the provisions in the budget that would drastically reduce the value of takeovers that would be examined under the Investment Canada Act.

In view of the fact that he voted against our motion to stop the Canada-China FIPA, and also in view of his leader's support for the takeover of Nexen by a Chinese state corporation, does he have any concern about this reduction in the size of takeovers that would be examined under the Investment Canada Act?

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, always I have concerns. It happens in my riding. Corporations in my riding, and in many situations, fishermen, miners and loggers, are put in a grave situation.

However, I am not going to completely turn off the tap of investment into my area. If I did that, it would be far worse than what we have right now. If we turn off the investment in the mining sector in my riding alone, and part of the new riding I will inherit after the next election, if we do not sign onto these agreements that allow reciprocity, we will find ourselves at a disadvantage. None of that will be extracted and no benefits will be taken.

I have my concerns, just like the hon. member does, but I do not close the door completely and lock it to future investment in the area. There is no company in my riding that can extract this mineral. There is no one company that can take all this, whether it is oil, gas or logging. We need that outside investment for this to work, and yes, reciprocity is a two-way street.

The unfairness is vetted through many boards. There are certain mechanisms by which we can settle these disputes. Granted, some of these disputes do not work out for us. However, that does not mean I am willing to eliminate this whole process. That would be far more detrimental than the situation my hon. friend proposes.

[Translation]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my Liberal colleague has opened the door, and I will therefore ask him the question that I put to his colleague from Ottawa—Vanier concerning employment insurance and the EI fund.

Is transferring money from the EI fund to the consolidated revenue fund in order to pay down deficits elsewhere a form of veiled tax?

[English]

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, would it be a veiled tax? What the member is talking about is what the Auditor General said some time ago about putting it into consolidated revenue and whether that was the right thing to do. The money did not disappear. It went into consolidated revenue.

If he is talking about an employment insurance tax on people, as opposed to keeping it in there, it becomes a premium. A tax is a tax, as my hon. colleague from the Conservatives said, whether it is a premium or whether it is through general revenue taxes, which most of the consolidated revenue comes from.

I am not quite sure where he is coming from with his question, but I would be happy to answer anything else.

I will ask him a question. If he is going to be in government the next time, will he put that \$52 billion back into revenue?

Government Orders

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the member's comments. He spoke about a number of measures in this piece of legislation. I know he has spent some time in my riding, the electric city, Peterborough, Ontario. I also know that he has frequented his own area. I also know that he is an accomplished weatherman. I wonder if he has read the barometer on a number of the issues in the budget, such as incentives for manufacturing, the extension and indexing of the gas tax credit for municipalities and infrastructure funding. Has he read the barometer on these and found out that they are indeed popular?

• (1705)

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, I feel as if my dew point is rising.

I want to thank my hon. colleague from Peterborough. I am a huge fan of that city. It is a fantastic little place. I say little, but it is actually bigger, but it has that small town feel to it. I remember many times sitting in Haaseltons having coffee downtown. It is a great place.

What is the barometer reading for what he is talking about? It is high pressure, sunny skies; low pressure, not so sunny. It is very simple. I can see the barometer dropping as we speak.

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in the House and speak to Bill C-60, an act to implement certain measures in the budget that was presented on March 21 by the Minister of Finance.

This bill is about continuing the important work of this government on jobs, growth and long-term prosperity. This bill would implement very important measures for all Canadians, and I know it would improve the lives of people across Canada and in my riding of Mississauga—Streetsville.

At the outset, I would like to quote some of other things the Minister of Finance told the House on March 21 when he tabled economic action plan 2013. He stated:

Canada is in an enviable position among the world's industrial economies. We have fared relatively better than most in the aftermath of the worst recession in a generation. As many of our allies and trading partners continue to struggle, we are well placed to prosper.

...by sticking to the long...view...by taking strong, decisive actions whenever it has been required. We have grown stronger, even as many have weakened.

However, he went on to say:

...it is...clear to the world that Canada has picked the right path and the right plan, a responsible plan for jobs, growth and long-term prosperity.

I am proud to be a member of a government that is committed to a solid plan for the near and long term. I am proud of a Minister of Finance and a Prime Minister who have put the economy first. However, I am also immensely proud of Canadians who continue to work hard, do their best and make Canada the greatest country in the world. There is no better way this is shown than through community service and charitable giving. It has been my honour and privilege to serve on many community agencies in the city of Mississauga with passionate volunteers for more than three decades. I see the wonderful work that each and every one of them does, and I see the tremendous generosity of people who donate to these vital organizations.

That is why I am so delighted to see that this bill would implement a new super credit for first-time donors to charitable organizations, so that we may bring in thousands of new contributors to support these important services. Charitable giving promotes philanthropy and good citizenship while helping others when they need it most.

I had the distinct pleasure to serve as a member of the board of directors of the Peel Children's Aid Society and Peel Children's Aid Foundation, and I am very pleased to see that this bill would allow certain adoption-related expenses, incurred before a child's adoption file is opened, to be now eligible for the adoption expense tax credit. Our CAS system plays a very important role in adoption, and any way we can help families with the costs of this would be greatly appreciated.

I see as well that there is good news in this bill for veterans. The bill would amend the War Veterans Allowance Act to ensure that veterans' disability benefits would no longer be deducted when calculating the war veteran allowance, and the contributions for the Last Post Fund for funeral and burial services would be doubled.

Further, this budget is very good news for our partners in the municipalities across Canada. Bill C-60 proposes to index the gas tax revenue that is sent to municipalities, which they use for important transit and transportation infrastructure that suits local needs. Our last budget made this transfer permanent, and this one would ensure that the funds would grow with inflation. This government respects our towns and cities, and works with them as true partners. I am certain that in my own city of Mississauga these important funds would help our city continue to grow and provide needed transportation infrastructure for many years to come.

• (1710)

As a member of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, I am very pleased to see that this bill proposes changes to the temporary foreign worker program, to ensure that it operates within its original mandate—to permit the use of foreign workers on a temporary basis in certain sectors where Canadians cannot fill those jobs—and to ensure ultimate accountability through a new registration and fee process. While there has been much media fanfare about the TFW program, it is still a vital system for some areas of the country and should be improved, not scrapped. Bill C-60 proposes a strengthened program with the proper checks and balances as we move forward.

There is also new support for job creators. Bill C-60 proposes changes to the mineral exploration tax credit, it would extend the temporary accelerated capital cost allowance rate for machinery and equipment, and it would modernize the general preferential tariff regime for developing countries to help Canadian companies better compete with foreign firms.

Government Orders

It also would provide more than \$70 million in tariff relief for families purchasing sports equipment or baby clothing.

Through this budget, the Government of Canada is renewing its commitment of fiscal transfers to the provinces for equalization until March of 2019, providing them that important sense of stable funding. Bill C-60 would make a number of changes that continue Canada moving on the path of better jobs and greater prosperity. It sets an important tone of confidence and responsibility at times that are still cautious and fragile. This is not the time to propose huge new tax increases on Canadians or go on wild spending sprees. We cannot play fast and loose with Canadians' hard-earned tax dollars, and we cannot slag our trading partners and the private sector.

As we move forward, I look forward to the implementation of the new Canada job grant with the provinces and employers; I look forward to the ten-year renewal of the Canada building fund with provinces and municipalities; I look forward to the five-year renewal of the affordable housing program and the homelessness partnering strategy; I look forward to the renewal of the hiring tax credit for Canada's job creators; I look forward to new investments in innovation and technology; and I look forward to Canada's continued economic leadership at home and in the world.

It is easy for members on the other side to criticize while offering no ideas of their own, other than raising taxes and increasing spending. That is not a plan for Canada; it is a recipe for disaster.

As the Minister of Finance concluded on March 21:

Today we move this responsible plan forward, forward toward that bright future. With this plan, our government renews our commitment to Canadians, our commitment to jobs, our commitment to growth, our commitment to long-term prosperity for all Canadians.

• (1715)

The Speaker: It being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to an order made Thursday, May 2, 2013, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill now before the House.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1755)

(The House divided on the amendment, which was defeated on the following division:)

(Division No. 674)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)
Angus
Aubin
Bélanger
Bennett
Bevington
Blanchette-Lamothé
Borg
Boutin-Sweet
Brosseau
Caron
Cash
Chisholm
Chow
Cleary
Comartin
Crowder
Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver East)
Dewar
Dionne Labelle
Dubé
Dusseau
Eyking
Fortin
Fry
Garrison
Genest-Jourdain
Godin
Gravelle
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Hughes
Jacob
Kellway
Lapointe
Laverdière
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
MacAulay
Marston
Mathysen
McGuinity
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Mourani
Murray
Nash
Nunez-Melo
Papillon
Péclet
Pilon
Quach
Rafferty
Ravignat
Regan
Sandhu
Scott
Sgro
Sims (Newton—North Delta)
St-Denis
Stoffer
Thibeault
Tremblay
Turnel

Andrews
Ashton
Ayala
Bellavance
Benskin
Blanchette
Boivin
Boulerice
Brisson
Byrne
Casey
Chicoine
Choquette
Christopherson
Coderre
Côté
Cullen
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Day
Dion
Donnelly
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Easter
Foote
Freeman
Garneau
Genest
Giguère
Goodale
Groguhé
Hsu
Hyer
Karygiannis
Lamoureux
Latendresse
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
Leslie
Mai
Masse
McCallum
Michaud
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Mulcair
Nantel
Nicholls
Pacetti
Patri
Perreault
Plamondon
Rae
Rankin
Raynault
Rousseau
Scarpaleggia
Sellah
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
Sitsabaiesan
Stewart
Sullivan
Toone
Trudeau
Valerioté — 124

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy
Adler
Albas
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambler
Anders
Armstrong
Aspin
Bateman
Bergen
Adams
Aglukkaq
Albrecht
Allison
Ambrose
Anderson
Ashfield
Baird
Benoit
Bernier

Government Orders

Blaney
 Boughen
 Breitzkreuz
 Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
 Bruinooge
 Calandra
 Cannan
 Carrie
 Chong
 Clement
 Davidson
 Del Mastro
 Dreeshen
 Dykstra
 Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
 Fletcher
 Gallant
 Glover
 Goodyear
 Gourde
 Harper
 Hawn
 Hiebert
 Holder
 Jean
 Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
 Kent
 Komarnicki
 Lake
 Lebel
 Leitch
 Leung
 Lobb
 Lunney
 MacKenzie
 McColeman
 Menegakis
 Merrifield
 Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
 Moore (Fundy Royal)
 Norlock
 O'Connor
 O'Toole
 Payne
 Preston
 Rajotte
 Reid
 Richards
 Saxton
 Seeback
 Shipley
 Smith
 Sorenson
 Storseth
 Tilson
 Toews
 Trotter
 Tweed
 Valcourt
 Van Loan
 Warawa
 Watson
 Sky Country)
 Weston (Saint John)
 Williamson
 Woodworth
 Young (Oakville)
 Zimmer — 151

Block
 Braid
 Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
 Brown (Barrie)
 Butt
 Calkins
 Carmichael
 Chisu
 Clarke
 Crockatt
 Dechert
 Devolin
 Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
 Fast
 Flaherty
 Galipeau
 Gill
 Goguen
 Gosal
 Grewal
 Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
 Hayes
 Hoback
 James
 Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
 Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
 Kerr
 Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
 Lauzon
 Leef
 Lemieux
 Lizon
 Lukiwski
 MacKay (Central Nova)
 Mayes
 McLeod
 Menzies
 Miller
 Obhrai
 O'Neill Gordon
 Paradis
 Poilievre
 Raitt
 Rathgeber
 Rempel
 Ritz
 Schellenberger
 Shea
 Shory
 Sopuck
 Stanton
 Sweet
 Toet
 Trost
 Truppe
 Uppal
 Van Kesteren
 Wallace
 Warkentin
 Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
 Wilks
 Wong
 Yelich
 Young (Vancouver South)

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the amendment defeated.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

● (1805)

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

(Division No. 675)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Baird
Bateman	Benoit
Bergen	Bernier
Blaney	Block
Boughen	Braid
Breitzkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Butt
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan	Carmichael
Carrie	Chisu
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Crockatt
Daniel	Davidson
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Fast	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Flaherty	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Gill	Glover
Goguen	Goodyear
Gosal	Gourde
Grewal	Harper
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hoback	Holder
James	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Lebel
Leef	Leitch
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Mayes	McColeman
McLeod	Menegakis
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Norlock
Obhrai	O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon	O'Toole
Paradis	Payne
Poilievre	Preston
Raitt	Rajotte
Rathgeber	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Ritz	Saxton

Private Members' Business

Schellenberger	Seeback
Shea	Shipley
Shory	Smith
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Storseth
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Toews
Trost	Trottier
Truppe	Tweed
Uppal	Valcourt
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	Wilks
Williamson	Wong
Woodworth	Yelich
Young (Oakville)	Young (Vancouver South)
Zimmer— 153	

Stewart	Stoffer
Sullivan	Thibeault
Toone	Tremblay
Trudeau	Turnel
Valeriote— 125	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Finance.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

The Speaker: It being 6:12 p.m., the House can now proceed to the consideration of private members' business, as listed on today's order paper.

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Ashton
Aubin	Ayala
Bélangier	Bellavance
Bennett	Benskin
Bevington	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Borg	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Brison
Brosseau	Byrne
Caron	Casey
Cash	Chicoine
Chisholm	Choquette
Chow	Christopherson
Cleary	Coderre
Comartin	Côté
Crowder	Cullen
Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dewar	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Dubé	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseault	Easter
Eyking	Footé
Fortin	Freeman
Fry	Gameau
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Godin	Goodale
Gravelle	Groguhé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Hsu
Hughes	Hyer
Jacob	Karygiannis
Kellway	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Latendresse
Laverdière	LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Leslie
MacAulay	Mai
Marston	Masse
Mathysen	May
McCallum	McGuinty
Michaud	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)	Mourani
Mulcair	Murray
Nantel	Nash
Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
Pacetti	Papillon
Patry	Péclet
Perreault	Pilon
Plamondon	Quach
Rae	Rafferty
Rankin	Ravignat
Raynault	Regan
Rousseau	Sandhu
Scarpaleggia	Scott
Sellah	Sgro
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Simms (Newton—North Delta)	
Sitsabaiesan	St-Denis

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

KOREAN WAR VETERANS DAY ACT

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC) moved that Bill S-213, An Act respecting a national day of remembrance to honour Canadian veterans of the Korean War, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today and join my colleagues in support of Bill S-213, an act to establish Korean War veterans day.

I would like to offer a special thanks to my colleague the hon. Senator Yonah Martin, who proposed this legislation, and thank her for her tireless work on this initiative and for bringing Bill S-213 forward. I share her desire to recognize the thousands of Canadian men and women who have served our country and made a significant contribution to international peace and security.

I would also like to thank our Minister of Veterans Affairs for declaring 2013 the Year of the Korean War Veteran. I was encouraged to hear that the minister recently travelled with 36 veterans to South Korea on a commemorative trip. The minister's work ensures that the Korean War will never be thought of again as the forgotten war. I stand alongside the minister as he continues to stand up for Korean War veterans and all veterans.

I would like to thank the representatives of the Korean War Veterans Association for their support of this legislation.

I can assure all members of the House that this government, more than any in recent history, is committed to giving every possible support to the members of the Canadian Armed Forces. We are also committed to ensuring Canadian veterans are treated with the dignity and respect that they deserve. They have brought honour to Canada and we in turn will honour them.

Private Members' Business

On November 11, Canadians pause to remember their brave countrymen and women who have given their all in the service of Canada. Through this national act of remembrance, we honour all veterans. We honour those who served in war and those who served in peace. We honour those who served in all theatres of war. We honour those who have served in Canada helping our communities respond to and recover from natural disasters. We honour those who continue to stand for peace and freedom and operations all over the world, most recently in Afghanistan and Libya.

This legislation constitutes a specific recognition of those who served in the Korean War and who selflessly contributed to the peace and security of the Republic of Korea in the years following the armistice.

The timing of this legislation is equally significant and appropriate. The year 2013 marks the 60th anniversary of the Korean War Armistice, a milestone worthy of recognition and reflection. In fact, the Prime Minister has declared 2013 as the Year of Korea in Canada in part to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Korean War Armistice, as well as 50 years of formal diplomatic relations between our two great countries.

The Minister of Veterans Affairs, as members know, followed the Prime Minister's lead by also declaring 2013 the Year of the Korean War Veteran in his department.

We are proud to honour Canada's veterans for what they have accomplished on land, at sea and in the air during the Korean War. That is why our government has presented certificates of recognition this year to Canadian Korean War veterans. We worked in partnership with the Republic of Korea last month to have 36 Canadian veterans of the Korean War revisit the battlefields where they had served. This trip was very important to these veterans. I will highlight Mr. Harry Marshall, a veteran of the Korean War who said, "It is with many mixed emotions that I take this journey, but it is important to honour all of those who served in this war 60 years ago."

It is for these important reasons that the Minister of Veterans Affairs has promoted a full weekend to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Korean War Armistice in Ottawa at the end of June.

The Korean War will always be an important chapter, a defining moment, in our country's proud military history. It deserves special recognition, which is why I urge all members to support this proposed legislation to create a national day in honour of Korean War veterans.

With my remaining time I would like to talk about the extraordinary service and sacrifice of Canada's veterans during the Korean War and begin by placing their efforts within a wider context.

As we all know, the First and Second World Wars touched Canadians in every community across this great country, from the largest cities to the smallest towns. Everyone knew someone who had served overseas. Too many had lost a loved one. Against the backdrop of those two great wars, the Korean War seemed a bit different. It was obviously shorter and smaller in scale with far fewer casualties, so how could it possibly compare with the two global

conflicts? How could it command Canadians' attention the way the First and Second World Wars had? The hindsight of historians has helped us to understand the importance of the Korean War as well as its tragic impact on so many Canadian heroes and their families.

We now understand how critical it was for Canada and 15 other nations to provide combat troops and halt the spread of tyranny and oppression. I do not think there is anywhere other than the Korean Peninsula where that halt of oppression and tyranny is better shown in the world today.

Bill S-213 would ensure we forever remember the courage and sacrifice of the more than 26,000 brave Canadians who served during the Korean War and the approximately 7,000 who continued to serve after the armistice was signed in 1953.

Through Bill S-213 we can guarantee that future generations of Canadians never make the same mistake of treating the Korean War as anything less than the devastating war that it actually was.

● (1810)

Of course, Canada's veterans of the Korean War have never forgotten the 516 Canadians who gave their lives in service during the Korean War; the 516 Canadians who made the ultimate sacrifice defending the right of all people to live in peace and freedom. They have never forgotten their comrades who were wounded in battle or the families forever changed by war. They have never forgotten what they witnessed and endured, from the terrible human suffering to the terrifying violence and unending hardships. They remember the overwhelming odds they faced as they were greatly outnumbered on rugged and foreign terrain. They remember the local families fleeing from their homes with only what they could carry on their backs; young children following, hungry and scared. They remember the atrocities, the executions, the purges and massacres that also left countless civilians dead.

In short, Canada's veterans know the brutal truth about the Korean War. They are our clearest window into a great tragedy and, sadly, the passage of time is taking its toll on these Canadian heroes. Only about 10,600 of Canada's Korean veterans remain, most in their eighties or at least very close.

We have an urgent duty as a nation to preserve their stories and to ensure future generations actively remember. The Minister of Veterans Affairs has taken a very active role in ensuring that Canadians are educated about the sacrifices and stories of Korean War veterans. A national day to honour these veterans will help us do that. Korean War veterans day would inspire Canadians to explore our proud past and learn more about the contributions and sacrifices of such a remarkable group of men and women.

Private Members' Business

When support came to the Republic of Korea in 1950, Canada responded in numbers exceeding what the world might have expected from our country with its relatively small population. What is equally amazing is that many of the Canadians who served in Korea had already served in the Second World War. They had already witnessed unspeakable horrors and experienced great personal loss. They already knew the terrible cost of freedom and they were still willing to pay the price again. That is what made these seemingly ordinary Canadians so truly extraordinary.

They willingly travelled halfway around the world to serve in a foreign land; a land unlike anything most of them had ever seen. I am sure each one of them had his or her personal reasons for going, but I also believe they were united in their sense of purpose, and I am sure they would have echoed the words of statesman Edmund Burke who once said, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

I can only guess at how the course of history may have been different if Canada and her allies had done nothing, if we had stood by and let evil triumph.

We can paint many different pictures of what life in Canada would be like today if the United Nations had not stepped in and if North Korea had not been stopped in its tracks. Quite frankly, it is possible we would not even be here in this chamber today as elected officials in a free and democratic country, if not for the courage of men and women who answered the world's call so many years ago.

That is the legacy we have inherited from our soldiers, sailors, flyers, nurses, doctors and aboriginal veterans who distinguished themselves in a far-off war. We are the direct beneficiaries of their service and bravery. We are only able to serve here today because they served when Canada called upon them. We understand our debt in a very intuitive way, which is why I am so proud to support this bill.

I want to talk briefly about my own personal experience.

I had the privilege last fall of going to Korea with a number of Canadian Korean War veterans and seeing the cemetery in Busan, the United Nations cemetery. I participated in the service with those veterans and from the stories they told me, I could see how much that experience meant to them.

The Government of Korea and the people of Korea have certainly never forgotten. In fact, when I went to the national war museum in Korea, I could hear children laughing because it was required for so many young people to come through that museum and see what Canada and other countries had done. The names of every soldier who died in the Korean War are on placards outside adorning the entranceway and on various columns and pillars. There are some 40,000 U.S. soldiers and, of course, the 516 Canadians who died or were killed in action, and some 50 who died in service after the armistice was actually signed.

I am very grateful to my colleague, Senator Yonah Martin, for giving me this opportunity.

What I have in my hand is not a prop, and I do not want anybody to get the notion that is. It is an obituary that has been on the wall of my house that I have had the opportunity to read many times as a

youngster growing up. I am doing this right now for my grandpa Don and my Calkins family. It will be tough for me read this, but I will do my best.

● (1815)

It states:

Corporal James Alvin Calkins, 25, formerly of Rocky Mountain House, is the second Albertan to die in the Korean War. His parents, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Calkins, received word from the defence department that he had died of wounds received in the battle. He served with the Lord Strathcona's Horse in the second great war and for a time in the reserve army. On November 20th, 1950, he was sent with the 2nd battalion of the Princess Patricia's to train at Fort Lewis, Washington. He was a member of C Company. Surviving besides his parents are his two sisters, Miss Bertie Lloyd of Nordegg and Miss Jo Fredine of Rocky, two brothers, Joe of Rocky and Donald of Lacombe. Another brother, Robert, was killed in action in the Italian campaign.

There were many families touched by the Korean War, and the Calkins family was one of them. I am really glad to have the opportunity to present this bill in the House today. I hope it has the unanimous support of all my colleagues.

● (1820)

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would simply like to thank my colleague for a heartfelt and indeed stirring speech.

I wear a ring that was on my grandfather's hand when he lost his leg at the Battle of Drocourt-Quéant in 1918. I am well aware of the need to remember and honour our family members and fellow Canadians for what they have done over the decades for this country and indeed the larger values that they fought for.

I want to make one link. The hon. member noted that the Korean War was mobilized through the United Nations. In that same decade, the 1950s, another great Canadian, Lester Pearson, also helped mobilize the United Nations to bring to an end the Suez crisis. What we did in the Korean War and what happened at Suez deserve to be much better known by Canadians.

I thank the hon. member for bringing this bill forward. I had no particular question, just a comment.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, the Korean War in the 1950s, with the United Nations action, was a different time. It was a different era. It took a lot of leadership from all of our allies that were over there.

I want to thank my colleague for his personal input into this. It is a difficult thing for families and descendants to deal with. I am several generations down and it still affects me to this day. They are family members whom I have never met and never will have the opportunity to meet. I wonder how many other family members I would have had, had they survived. It is with great pleasure that I accept his comments.

Moving forward, we have to do everything we can as a nation to remind current and future generations of the tremendous sacrifices that were made by those who came before them. This bill would help to do that. I thank the member for his support.

Private Members' Business

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like the member, I have family members who participated not in the Korean War but in the Second World War. Obviously, the sacrifices that not only those individuals but their families made are of utmost value to all Canadians.

I would like to ask the member if he could comment on how he and his other family members came to the decision that this is something that should be memorialized. Why is this the focus for him and his family? Why is this so meaningful not just to himself but possibly to his children and other family members? Why does he feel so passionately about bringing forward this private member's bill?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, obviously the personal link for me to the Korean War is a matter of public record. It is something that I am passionate about simply because I do not think it has been well documented. It is called the forgotten war. I made comments on that in my speech. However, I can say that for those who served in Korea and for the family members of those who served in Korea, it is not a forgotten war. For too long Canada brushed it aside as a United Nations action. I think it was called a policing action at the time, when the reality is that it was an all-out war on the Korean Peninsula.

One only has to read a book about the Korean War, for example, *Triumph at Kapyong* by Daniel Bjarnason, which is a fantastic read if anybody has an opportunity to do that. We had our Thermopylae in Korea and it is called the Battle of Kapyong. I did a statement about it here a little while ago. Seven hundred Canadians of 2PPCLI, the same regiment that my great-uncle was a member of, stood in the face of thousands where all others had failed. Seven hundred stood in the face of an onslaught of aggression by thousands and thousands of enemy soldiers, and they held their position for several days. They were only a few kilometres north of the current place where Seoul, Korea is.

It is an absolute travesty that we have not actually learned of the tremendous heroic measures. These guys were all volunteers who went over there. They all volunteered to sign up for this. They went over there and did yeoman service.

Nowhere else in the world today is there a more distinct delineation between triumph in a battle and what happens when we fail to preserve liberty, peace and freedom for individuals. The stark contrast is no better displayed anywhere in the world today than the Korean Peninsula.

• (1825)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very honoured to stand today and speak in favour of Bill S-213, An Act respecting a national day of remembrance to honour Canadian veterans of the Korean War.

The bill would designate July 27 as Korean War Veterans Day to remember and honour the courage and sacrifice of Canadians who served in the Korean War and performed peacekeeping duties following the armistice of July 27, 1953.

July 27 was chosen because the Korean War armistice was signed on that day in 1953, putting an end to three years of fighting. The

contribution of Canadian veterans of the Korean War has gone unrecognized for far too long.

This war started shortly after the end of World War II. Unfortunately, historians did not give the Korean War the importance it deserved, given the magnitude of World War II. As a result, the Korean War was too often forgotten.

This bill will again focus attention on the Korean War and do right by our veterans who fought in this war by giving them a day of commemoration to remember the sacrifice they made for Canada and South Korea.

This bill is in addition to the January 8, 2013, announcement by the Minister of Veterans Affairs, who declared 2013, which marks the 60th anniversary of the Korean War armistice, the Year of the Korean War Veteran.

Designating 2013 as the Year of the Korean War Veteran will allow Canadians to pay tribute to the 26,000 Canadians in uniform who came to the aid of South Koreans during that war. We will also be able to honour the 516 Canadians who died in service, defending the values of peace, freedom and democracy on the Korean Peninsula.

The NDP will support this bill because we want to highlight and commemorate the significant contribution made by our armed forces and our veterans, as well as the sacrifices made by their families during this major war.

I would like to congratulate the members from all parties and the veterans groups that worked together to create this bill.

Our critic for veterans affairs, the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, also took part in the drafting of this bill from the beginning. He suggested some improvements that were accepted right away so that everyone could support this important bill in order to do justice to the veterans of the Korean War. Everyone was able to work together for once. It is nice to see that, now and again, we can all contribute to the drafting of a bill.

I would also like to give some general background information on the Korean War conflict. Anyone who would like more detailed information can consult the Veterans Affairs website, which gives an excellent description.

At the end of the Second World War, the Soviet Union occupied North Korea while the Americans moved into South Korea.

After a communist government had been established in the north and a democratic government in the south, tensions between the two governments grew to a climax and, on June 25, 1950, the military forces of North Korea crossed the 38th parallel into South Korea. This marked the beginning of the war.

The newly formed United Nations decided to enter into its first armed intervention. Thus, 16 member nations, including Canada, would contribute military forces under the command of the United States.

Private Members' Business

Early in July 1951, ceasefire negotiations began. However, it was not until 1953 that peace was finally restored on the Korean Peninsula with the signing of the armistice on July 27, 1953.

It took two more years of negotiations and combat before peace was finally restored, when the armistice was signed at Panmunjom.

• (1830)

As I said, more than 26,000 Canadians were deployed in Korea, including the sailors on eight destroyers and the aviators who took part in numerous combat and transport missions.

I would therefore like to point out that Canada's contribution was among the largest of all the nations that participated in that conflict. I would also like to point out that the duty to support applies every day, and not just on national memorial days or during Remembrance Week.

In my opinion, tributes from the government are not the only way to honour our veterans. Obviously, the respect we have for our soldiers and how we commemorate our veterans can also be seen in how the government treats them through the services offered by Veterans Affairs Canada.

The NDP listens closely to what our veterans need and are asking for. In fact, our leader has met with a number of veterans' groups, as recently as this afternoon. That is how we keep in touch with Canadians and listen to what they need.

In my opinion, the best way to honour veterans is to treat them fairly. Today, for example, the compensation they are paid when they are injured does not treat them fairly. If they had been injured in a different workplace, various labour boards would have given them a lot more compensation than they receive at present. One of the best ways of paying tribute to our veterans is to treat them fairly. That is why, as the new charter is about to be revised, I call on the government to sit down with veterans and listen to what they are asking for, because there are a number of things to be done to improve the new charter.

In conclusion, we are supporting this important bill to give the Korean War and the veterans of that war a day so that it is no longer a forgotten war. This is a significant bill, and we thank the person who introduced it. I hope we will give this bill our unanimous support.

[*English*]

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I begin my speech by acknowledging the work of Senator Yonah Martin, who has championed and introduced the bill in the Senate.

The Korean War and armistice have special meaning for Senator Martin, having been born in Seoul, Korea, and being a recipient of Korea's Order of Civil Merit Moran Medal.

The Liberal Party joins with the government, the New Democrats and the Green Party in support of Bill S-213. The bill would mark each July 27 as a special day to acknowledge the signing of the armistice between South Korea and North Korea, and to honour our soldiers who went there in the service of their country and in support of the United Nations.

Last month, I was included in that delegation that the member for Wetaskiwin referred to, which went to South Korea to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Korean War. I was there with 36 veterans and their caregivers. It was a very moving experience. I am grateful to have the opportunity this evening to share with the House some of my thoughts about that trip.

The Korean War began on June 25, 1950, when the military forces of North Korea crossed into South Korea. Canada, operating under the United Nations, contributed significant combat forces to defend South Korea, and as the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth pointed out, this was also a very, very important day in the early history of the United Nations. It was the first time that a United Nations force was deployed, fighting under the United Nations flag.

There were many fierce battles during this conflict, and many soldiers paid the ultimate price. Canadians played a critical role during the war and saw action in the Battle of Kapyong in April 1951. During that two-day battle, 10 Canadians were killed and 23 were wounded.

In late October 1952, in a place referred to as Little Gibraltar, Canadians fought bravely, as they did in Kapyong, and held their own against a determined North Korean enemy.

There are many other stories of bravery and heroism. In total, more than 26,000 Canadians served in the Korean War, and 516 young Canadians died in the service of others and in defence against aggression.

Two other stories about the Korean War also stand out. It was an especially sad day on November 21, 1950, when 17 soldiers of the 2nd Regiment of the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery died in a train crash in British Columbia. These 17 soldiers were on their way to Korea. They were ready to take up the challenge and the call to service that would have taken them into a war zone. We cannot and shall not forget those 17 soldiers so tragically lost on that day.

The second relates to the contribution of Canadian women during the war. Not unlike the Second World War, women once again stepped up and played a vital role in the service of their country and to the war effort. More than 5,000 Canadian women served during the Korean War. They, too, bore witness to the brutality of war, many of them helping to nurse wounded soldiers. We think of them for their courage and sacrifice to Canada.

It is true that there was an armistice in 1953, but hostilities are still evident. While I was there, I was struck that just a mere hour north of Seoul, one is confronted by barbed wire fences that line the waterways. Heavily armed checkpoints are frequent and staffed around the clock. Spiked barrels prevent the easy passage of vehicles.

The demilitarized zone still has minefields and explosives set to destroy bridges and roads literally with the flip of a switch. Observation points continue to monitor movements of the enemy all along the 38th parallel. This is just in South Korea.

A state of alert continues to exist along the border. Not much is known, really, about North Korea, because of the tight control exercised by that regime. What we do know tells us a story of great poverty, human rights abuses and a country intent on continuing its nuclear weapons program.

It is my hope that one day this armistice will lead to a permanent and lasting peace, a peace that will allow for these two proud nations to set aside the past for good, for the good of harmony and prosperity.

● (1835)

Having been there, I can say there are a couple of encouraging signs. There is indeed an industrial park in North Korea that is operated with the co-operation of the two governments, with managers coming from South Korea and workers in the north. There also is a ministry of unification within the South Korean government, strangely enough.

The progress South Korea has experienced in the last 60 years is nothing short of remarkable. It is now the tenth largest economy in the world. The capital, Seoul, is a world-class, vibrant city of 11 million people, with high-rises and modern infrastructure. It has hosted the Olympics as well as the FIFA World Cup. It is a world leader in electronics and manufacturing. We have all heard of Hyundai and Samsung.

Again, what information we do have from North Korea indicates that this communist country has not fared nearly as well.

There is no question that the Canadian and UN veterans can take pride in and credit for the remarkable progress South Koreans have experienced over the last 60 years. South Korea has gone from being a recipient of foreign aid to a contributor. Canadians have helped a world citizen achieve its potential. It is the international community, not just the South Koreans, that is better for it.

The South Koreans have not forgotten. Everywhere the Canadian delegation went in Seoul, Busan, Kapyong and points in between, there were civilians waving, smiling and thanking us. Those smiling and acknowledging their Canadian heroes did so in a way that movingly broke through the language barrier. That was completely separate from the official, formal and military expressions of gratitude that were extended. Everyday citizens reacted to our veterans in a way that was spontaneous and heartfelt.

I should acknowledge the Minister of Veterans Affairs who led our delegation of Korean War veterans in Korea. We were there, as I indicated, to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Korean War. The minister included representatives from each of the opposition parties. The bipartisanship he has shown in this and in other commemorative events is a good example for his caucus and his cabinet colleagues.

We do not know when this conflict will finally end. We do hope that one day North Korea, a place of repression and secrecy, will begin to open up and allow more freedom and the protection of human rights.

We also hope that one day the sacrifice made 60 years ago by Canadian soldiers and others in defence of freedom will result in better conditions for the people of North Korea.

S. O. 52

I again want to congratulate the government for bringing this bill forward to the House of Commons and, again, thank Senator Martin for her service and dedication to the people of Korea and for efforts to make this special day to mark the end of the Korean War a reality.

● (1840)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay

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

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the division stands deferred until tomorrow, Wednesday, May 8, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

EMERGENCY DEBATE

[*English*]

SITUATION IN SYRIA

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The House will now proceed to the consideration of a motion to adjourn the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter requiring urgent consideration, namely the situation in Syria.

I will remind hon. members that in the course of emergency debates members are welcome to sit in any location that they choose in the House.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.) moved:

That this House do now adjourn.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Speaker of the House of Commons for giving us the opportunity to debate this issue today. I must confess that when I moved the motion, I was not sure whether the Speaker would agree with me on the urgency of the situation. I am very glad that he did.

S. O. 52

I am sure that many Canadians might ask themselves why the House of Commons would be taking a few extra hours on a Tuesday night to debate a question that to many Canadians may seem so far away. There are conflicts and challenges all over the world, yet this question of Syria has struck all of us as one that is extremely important. Let me try to express the reasons why.

It is because of where Syria is. It is a country of 22.5 million people in the middle of the Middle East, which over the last number decades has been perhaps the most difficult and challenging part of the world in terms of resolving conflict and dealing with the potential possibility of hostilities taking over and becoming even more serious than they are already.

It is a country that has become the test for the United Nations own sense of role and responsibilities to ensure civilians are protected and that there is human security for those people who are facing the challenge of how they will live, survive and get their next meal.

It is a country that not for a few years but for several decades has been ruled by a brutal dictatorship, that being the Assad family, the father and now the son, representing a relatively small religious sect within Islam, the Alawite sect. It has achieved the monopoly of the security service, armed itself significantly, and dramatically repressed the population, which has effectively closed its economy.

It is a country which in the face of the changes that are under way throughout the region has resisted every single one of these changes, in terms of opening up the economy, recognizing the plural nature of its society, establishing good relations with its neighbours and allowing a real sense of opportunity to its people.

Therefore, it really has been no surprise that at a time when there has been this movement called the Arab Spring—though some people now feel that is an inappropriately optimistic term to describe it—there would be strong elements within Syria that would insist that the country become more pluralistic and democratic, that it recognize human rights and that it allow its people to have their say in who their government would be.

When faced with this challenge from within, the Assad regime chose one particular path, that being the path of repression. That is a path which has caused enormous hardship to the people of Syria and which has caused great instability, not only in Syria but also throughout the region.

We now find that in a country of 22.5 million, some 1.5 million of them are now refugees living outside the country. That is in addition to the hundreds of thousands of people who, as the saying goes, are internally displaced. These are people who have been forced to leave their homes, forced to move somewhere else, or have had to leave whatever community they may have been in to get to a safer place. Of those 1.4 million refugees, some 62,000 are in Egypt, 143,000 in Iraq, 450,000 in Jordan, 450,000 in Lebanon and over 320,000 in Turkey.

By any definition, whatever else we face in Syria, whatever else may be said about the instability of what forces are at play, the overall security situation in the country, the challenge facing the security of the region itself from the violence and the repression in Syria, what we know for certain is that this is a humanitarian crisis of the first proportion.

● (1845)

This is an issue which affects not only the conscience of the world and therefore of Canada, but this is an issue which has to be dealt with on a practical basis. The presence of this many refugees in Jordan, and the presence of this many refugees in Lebanon and Turkey, poses a security risk and a threat to those countries, to say nothing of the financial risk and the financial threat which they face as a result of having this many people suddenly descend on them. These are not wealthy countries.

The minister is going to describe to us some of the things which the Government of Canada has been doing with respect to the refugee situation in Jordan, and I am afraid that members on our side are simply going to have to say “not yet enough”. There is still more to be done.

There is more to be done, in a few ways. The first is assisting these countries to deal with the refugee crisis in their midst. The second is assisting the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to deal with the continuing challenge it faces with having to run these camps. The third is to deal in a much more effective, efficient and advanced basis with the claims of many of those refugees to be reconciled with their relatives in Canada. That is as opposed to many other situations where we have responded more effectively as a country, and I think most recently of the crisis in Haiti, where claims for immigration were sped up so people could be reconciled with their families and we provided far more humanitarian aid. I would argue that in this situation Canada has been relatively slow to respond, proportionately to other countries certainly, and proportionately to the seriousness of the situation that is facing these countries.

Let us first of all recognize the humanitarian nature of the crisis. Let us recognize the fact that at the very least Canada has to be more engaged with other countries in dealing with the seriousness of the challenge posed to Syria's neighbours by virtue of the size and the extent of the refugee crisis.

My colleagues have spoken earlier, and my colleague from Scarborough held a press conference last week. He described the urgent challenge facing a great many people in these communities, where it appears the Canadian government has not been as responsive as it needs to be to the needs of people living in refugee camps. We do not appear to have a program in place that would allow for the speedy treatment and the speedy consideration of claims that are being made for reconciliation with families in Canada. We feel, and I am sure that the House feels the same, that we need to be doing more to respond to the urgent nature of this humanitarian crisis. Let me just complete this point. There is more to be done on the humanitarian crisis. There is more to be done for refugees. Canada needs to do more to step up to the plate and make a difference when it comes to dealing with the extent of the refugee crisis.

If that were the only issue, this could be a simple debate. However, the challenge the world now faces in Syria is one of the most difficult and one of the most complex challenges that we have faced in many different places.

S. O. 52

As I have said before, we have to recognize the military strength of the Assad regime. The Assad regime has the capacity to repress. It has repressed. It has not hesitated to bomb its own people. It has not hesitated to kill its own people. It has not hesitated to respond to every challenge to it by means of a military response. It has been brutal, and in that brutality the United Nations estimates that as many as 80,000 people may have been killed.

If we were to apply a simple test to see if the Assad regime has treated its own people in a brutal fashion and whether that justifies an effective response from the rest of the world, the answer would be yes, to which we could say the world has responded. The world has responded by saying we have to cut Syria off from financial access to other markets. We have to make sure the people who are leading the Syrian regime know how seriously the rest of the world treats what is going on in Syria. We have to make sure that every effort has been made, from a financial point of view, to isolate Syria.

• (1850)

One has to say, as strong as those efforts may have been and as coordinated as they have been, they have not had the effect to sufficiently weaken the Assad regime, to force it into a situation where it has to bargain with the rebels, come to terms with the need for change, and to make every effort to find a political solution to the crisis we face. That has not happened.

Another simple response would be to say, “Why would the world not simply conclude that if the Syrian regime is not prepared to treat its citizens properly, not prepared to respond to the various resolutions of the Security Council, the United Nations, the Arab League, all of the statements that have been made for the Government of Syria to come to grips with the reality, then why would the world not take further action, military action?”

• (1855)

[*Translation*]

Naturally, there are always those who think that military action is required in a situation where a government does not heed global opinion or international laws, such as those made by the United Nations based on decisions of the General Assembly and the Security Council to ensure that countries treat their citizens in a fair and equitable manner.

However, it is important to recognize the problem. The problem that exists in the Middle East currently exists in Syria. Because of the nature of the conflict and Syria's geographic location in the Middle East, there is no easy military solution.

I just watched the minister on television a moment ago. He said that he would prefer a political solution to a military one. I believe that it is difficult to contradict what the Minister of Foreign Affairs said because we would all prefer a political solution to a military one. However, the problem is that people are saying that, without military pressure on Syria, the rebels, those who are revolting against Syria's dictatorial government, will not get help and the Syrian regime will say that there is not a problem, that there is no pressure and that it is not necessary to find solutions. The civil war will therefore continue. That is why we are saying that this is a complex situation.

However, it is important to remember one thing. Syria is in difficulty. It is in the midst of a civil war. Eighty thousand people are dead because of it. The world cannot just stand by and watch. We must find solutions. That is why we are calling for a greater commitment from the Canadian government.

[*English*]

I know the minister has said, and I think it is the strongest statement that I have certainly heard, that he is satisfied with the evidence that chemical weapons have been used in the struggle, but the difficulty is finding out who has used them, when they were used and how they were used. Again, I find myself in agreement with the minister. Of course that is what the world has to do, and of course it is proving very difficult to do it.

Where, in fact, I think there is a need for us to be more engaged and not less engaged as a country is in recognizing the challenge that the instability in Syria creates for the entire region. The instability in Syria affects Lebanon. The instability in Syria affects Jordan. The instability in Syria affects Israel, which is why Israel has felt obliged to respond when faced with evidence that missiles are going from Iran to Syria to Hezbollah.

We cannot look at this situation in isolation. We cannot say that this all seems like a conflict that is so far away that we cannot get involved and cannot be concerned. The reality is that not only is there a humanitarian crisis which demands a response from the rest of the world, there is also a crisis which will not stand still. Unless the world effectively engages with it, the stability of the entire region is threatened.

This is why we continue to hear from others in the region that they want to see a more coordinated response from the rest of the world.

I am not one of those who think that Canada itself is going to come up with a magical solution, that somehow there is going to be some miraculous Canadian intervention that will make a difference on its own. We are a middle power; however, we are a middle power with many friends and we are a middle power that is respected.

As a middle power, we have an obligation to use every means possible to bring two things into effect. The first is to ensure that the oppression and the killing for which the Assad regime is responsible comes to an end. The second is to be part of the effort to use the International Criminal Court to hold those who are responsible for the conflict and for the death and mayhem in Syria to account. If we do not stand up for the rule of international law and for the role of the International Criminal Court, we are simply saying to the Assad regime that it can wash its hands of this conflict and nobody will ask any questions.

Finally, we have to recognize one other thing. It is not only the use of chemical weapons posing a threat to the very existence of some people and of some communities and it is not only the tremendous instability created by the use of chemical weapons, completely against every order of international law and any test of humanity; it is, as the minister referred to in his public comments, the extent to which Syria has become a playground for extremism.

S. O. 52

We now know that there are fighters from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Chechnya, as well as fighters who were in Iraq but are now back in Syria. We have to understand that this is the world in which we now live. However, the answer to that is not for Canada to be less engaged with the opposition, but to be even more engaged with the opposition.

I do not mean engaged in arming the opposition, as the minister might think I am saying, because that has never been a role that Canada has played. Canada has never played the role of an arms supplier to these various civil insurrections. What Canadians have done is to say we are not afraid of becoming politically engaged and reaching a better understanding who is who and who is where.

When we talk to people from the Syrian community in Canada, their main concern and main complaint, frankly, is that the Conservative government seems to be too determined to take a hands-off approach to even understand the nature of the conflict and the various elements in the opposition.

I am not pretending for a moment that it is easy. I am not pretending that it lends itself to easy solutions, and because of the very forces of instability that are now at play, I do not believe at the moment that a one-sided military intervention from the United States or from some other coalition is likely to get us to where we need to be.

I strongly support what Secretary Kerry and President Putin have decided to do, which is to hold another conference to get countries together to try and find a political solution. However, I do think we have to recognize that unless the world stands prepared to take the necessary steps to create the stability that we want to see and that the world needs to see in Syria, the risk is even greater instability in the years ahead and even greater hardship for the people who are living there.

It is a humanitarian crisis, a political crisis, a security crisis and an issue that demands a response from Canada. We would all like to see a future of stability, one in which the drive from Jerusalem to Damascus and from Damascus to Beirut could happen with nary a checkpoint, a future in which a train ride from Tel Aviv to Beirut could happen with nary a checkpoint. We would like to see that kind of world. It is an open world, a free world and a democratic world.

We are not going to get there overnight. We are not going to get there by wishing for it or by praying for it. We are not going to get there by simply analyzing what is happening from a great distance. We have to be prepared to become more engaged. In that engagement, Canada will gain some of the respect and some of the position in the world that Canada deserves for the efforts that it can make and should make in the months ahead.

● (1900)

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. Liberal foreign affairs critic for his speech. I listened to it and I found it quite interesting. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome him back to the foreign affairs file and say that we on the foreign affairs committee look forward to working with him in the coming weeks and months.

To begin with, I wanted to correct a couple of things that I heard him say that I think were not quite correct.

He insinuated that Canada had somehow not done its fair share in humanitarian relief efforts in Syria. Nothing could be further from the truth. The fact is that Canada—and I know he has the means to check these facts—is the largest contributor on a per capita basis to humanitarian relief with respect to Syrian refugees through the refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

Turkey is very grateful and thankful for the funds that have been directed from Canada through the Red Crescent Society. I had the opportunity to visit some of those Syrian refugee camps in January with the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration when that was announced.

Second, he mentioned that Turkey was not a wealthy country. Turkey is the 16th-largest economy in the world. It is a G20 nation, and relative to a lot of countries in Europe, it is doing quite well in terms of its economy these days.

Many people have suggested that something that could be done to help the people in Syria would be for the international community, including Turkey, to establish a no-fly zone along the Turkish border between Aleppo and the Turkish border. It would be a place where people could go to get away from the fighting and be safe, and anything that attacked them from the air could be knocked down by a coalition of international forces in that region.

What does the member think about that limited possibility?

● (1905)

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, I hesitate to improvise military policy on the fly in the House of Commons of Canada. I think a lot of suggestions will be made as to what additional form of military pressure could be put on Syria short of some kind of massive invasion or bombing. My own sense of the current civilian situation is that bombing of any indiscriminate kind would have a huge effect on the civilian population of Syria and would not advance the cause whatsoever.

The Syrian air force is not exactly without capability, so if we are going to establish a no-fly zone, we have to be aware of what the response would be from the Syrian air force. Our experience with other no-fly zones is that if we want to establish a no-fly zone, we would have to knock out virtually the entire air defence capacity of Syria. Doing that is an enormously complex and difficult undertaking, and one whose consequences one would have to understand.

My point is that in thinking through what we are going to do, at every step of the way we need to think through what the consequences of these actions would be. What are the next steps going to be? What are the conclusions that we are going to reach?

My concern on the one side is that if we are not prepared to look at every possibility, that will be read by the Assad regime as another get-out-of-jail-free card. They will continue to see this as the world talking big and doing little and they will continue to see it as a licence to do whatever they want to do.

S. O. 52

On the other side, if we simply engage in an excess of rhetoric that leads us to say here are red lines and here are lines in the sand and here is what we are now going to do, everyone has to understand the importance of what I call consequential thinking. What is going to be the consequence of that step? How are we going to follow it up? I think the issue that the minister—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. I will allow the member about 20 seconds or so to finish his thought, and then we do need to get on with questions and comments.

Hon. Bob Rae: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will not abuse it.

The minister has pointed out quite rightly that the question is “What follows Assad?” What do we really know about the forces that are going to be replacing Assad? That is the most consequential question we have to ask, and we have to say that it is something to which we have to have an answer.

That is not an excuse for supporting the Assad regime, but it is a way of insisting that for whatever steps we take, we have to better understand the consequences.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to touch on recent events. The hon. member just mentioned in his comments that there have been meetings between Secretary of State Kerry and his colleague in Russia. One of the things we have seen before is that while intentions to meet in order to deal bilaterally with the civil war in Syria in a serious manner and then move on from there are fine, we all hope that it goes somewhere.

We also know that, as was the case with Iraq and even Libya, as much as what is happening right now is a concern, the concern is what will happen afterward. I would like the hon. member's comment on that point.

What I will be laying out in my comments, and what the NDP is laying out, is that we need to start here at home with those Syrian-Canadians who are ready and willing to provide services. Some have already gone on their own dime to work on the ground, not militarily, but to provide services. That is going to be needed immediately. It is needed right now, but once there is some peace, it will be an absolutely critical period.

I would like to get the hon. member's comment about the idea of bringing together Canadians who are ready, willing and able to do that, and about starting to plan for that immediately.

• (1910)

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, I have had several meetings with the Syrian community in Canada and I think the member's point is absolutely correct. In all my meetings with the Syrian community here, I have had a sense of some frustration that they have not been getting the kind of support they would have hoped to receive in order to do the work they want to do.

Last week we talked about matching funds and the need to ensure that there is a safe place to put the money and to ensure that it is being used for humanitarian purposes. However, once we have those assurances, we ought to take that step.

I think everyone here in the House recognizes that being an international country, as we are, we have the benefit of having a lot of people here who have a lot of expertise on what is going on in the

Middle East and in Syria. Therefore, I agree with the member that it is something we need to be exploring much more vigorously than we have been.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as was alluded to, it is not only a Middle East situation but also a situation that concerns the people in Canada.

My question is more on the diplomatic side.

The member for Ottawa Centre alluded to the U.S. and the Russians dealing with it using a diplomatic approach. On the UN side, one would think the UN could do a lot more on the situation. With our position at the UN now, to an extent we have taken a second seat to it. My question is this: what more could the UN do, and with our position now, have we compromised how much we can push forward on a UN solution to this situation?

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, we have to explore every avenue. Mr. Brahimi is on the ground. He is trying to find some grounds for political consensus. It is fair to say that like everyone who has tried this approach, he is facing a tremendous challenge, and it is not easy. There are Canadian citizens who are involved in helping Mr. Brahimi in trying to find solutions. It is not at all easy for us to do. As Canadians, we have to encourage every possible avenue of success.

I regret as much as every other member of the House that we did not gain a seat on the Security Council, but in the last 50 years there have been many years when we have not been on the Security Council and have been able to play a constructive role. We need to continue to look at what we can do and how we can participate more effectively in those efforts.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there is nothing more terrible than war. Still worse than war is civil war. My family experienced civil war in Lebanon. I would not wish the experience of civil war on anyone.

What is currently happening in Syria brings back a lot of painful memories: brothers killing brothers, children without a childhood, burnt bodies, massacres, torture, children's fear-filled eyes, suffering, despair.

I do not think Canada should play a part in causing more suffering. We have a duty to act, but to act for peace. Political action can be a response to an extremely complex situation, but it must be an equally complex response. What Canada can and must do is repatriate all those Canadian families who are awaiting visas for their non-Canadian children. Canada must be compassionate and bring back refugees, and it must help the persecuted minorities, including Christians, Kurds and Assyrians.

Canada must definitely not send military troops to Syria. It must not arm the rebels because we know that there are terrorist groups among these utterly fragmented factions. Above all, let us not arm the Salafists, who will turn those weapons against us and against our children. I beg you not to do that.

For example, groups that have pledged allegiance to Al Qaeda—

S. O. 52

•(1915)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. I apologize for having to interrupt the member, but her speaking time is up. She will probably have a chance to continue her speech at another time.

The hon. member for Toronto Centre has the floor.

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, everyone surely shares the feelings, emotions and thoughts of the member for Ahuntsic, who has just spoken.

For the moment, no one in this House, on the New Democrat, Liberal or government sides, is suggesting that the military solution is preferable or that it is the Canadian government's role to arm any group whatsoever.

The minister has spoken in the past few days about the importance of knowing what the opposition is in Syria and where the Salafist, terrorist and extremist elements are. The member is therefore entirely right in saying that the situation is complex. However, that complexity must not become an excuse for inaction. That is the problem we now face.

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Speaker for granting this debate. It is a tremendously important opportunity to give an update to the House and all Canadians, both on the actions that the Government of Canada has taken to date to address the Syrian crisis and on the most recent developments.

The actions this government has taken and the engagement this government has put on this file have been real and significant. I think I share with all civilized people everywhere the frustration that the civilized world has not been able to bring a resolution to this crisis. Many of us have been working tremendously hard.

This debate tonight is also a chance for us to take stock of where we go from here.

As I rise to speak tonight, I am reminded, as I often am when considering the many complex issues relating to the Syrian crisis, of one of the conflict's youngest victims.

She was a girl of about seven years old. I had a chance to meet her at Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan. This was not a good place for a family, living in a tent in a refugee camp in the middle of the desert with the heat and scorpions. As horrible as the situation was for her and her family, I thought of how tough it must have been for her family in Syria.

I thought of how difficult it must have been to make the decision for her and her entire family to leave their home and to seek refuge in another country. I thought of the courage it took for her parents to do that, to want to do one thing, to keep their family safe, just like every Canadian family and every Canadian parent's objective is.

She and her family had fled their home. They had left everything they had known in a bid to escape death and destruction that had stalked their hometown.

Many of the refugees crossing the borders into Jordan, and I saw videotapes, have been shot at as they have crossed the border. When

I visited a refugee camp, I met with Jordanian authorities. I was shown videos of a man carrying his young baby across the border being shot at, and of a pregnant woman being shot as she sought to enter Jordan and having the physical wherewithal to continue running, only to make it to safety and die in the hospital after. They dodged sniper bullets to make it to what they hoped would be safety.

This young girl that I talked to had quite an effect on me. She has lost some, if not a great deal, of the innocence of her youth. It was quite evident she could not speak English. She did not have much to say, although I could see that she was filled with fear and a longing for stability.

My colleague, the Foreign Minister of Jordan, Nasser Judeh, was with me. Nasser translated. I said to ask her how she was doing. We were there to see the well-being of people. I will never forget her answer. She looked in his eyes and said one thing as tears built up in her eyes, "I don't like it here. I want to go home." That is one small child who in many ways summarizes so much of the problems this crisis has created.

Nearly a year later, the sad report is that this young girl's future is no brighter. Families just like hers are arriving by the hundreds, if not the thousands every day. Many nights, 2,000 people flee across the border to Jordan.

Camp Zaatari is now the world's second-largest refugee camp. It would actually be the fourth largest city in the Kingdom of Jordan, if it were a permanent city. We think of the generosity of the Jordanian people, the Jordanian government, and His Majesty King Abdullah II in allowing people to flee their country to seek refuge.

More than two years into this crisis, the situation only continues to grow more desperate.

•(1920)

While some might become numb by the endless stream of bad news or be tempted to shut out the details of a situation that only seems to grow more hopeless, it is for the sake of that little girl I just mentioned and for the millions of other people like her that we are compelled to remain actively engaged.

I would suggest to all hon. members that the only way to end the suffering of the Syrian people is through a political solution to this crisis. We have not gone out of our way to criticize those who are seeking to arm the opposition. If it were only as simple as to provide more guns, more rockets, more bullets, more grenades to bring an end to this crisis, I think it would have already ended a long time ago. However, I have felt for some time that the more arms that flow into that country, the more Assad ratchets up his military power. As bad and evil as the Assad regime has been military-wise, exercising brute force against its own people, it is probably operating only on six of eight cylinders. As bad as it is, these people have only just started. The more well armed the opposition becomes, the more brutal and violent and tough the government gets. It still has the capacity to make it worse. The better armed, better equipped the Free Syrian Army and other regime opponents have become, the more violent and more aggressive the Assad regime has become.

S. O. 52

We saw it in Houla last May. We saw it in Daraa last August, and in other places since. Opposition strength to the Assad regime has unleashed a merciless response from that regime. The United Nations Security Council, unfortunately, has failed to effectively tackle this challenge. It is conflicted, but the world is conflicted too. People have different views and are rooting for different sides.

I do want to take the opportunity here in this House to congratulate the Arab League for stepping up in a major way to fill this void. It has spoken out loudly and clearly for some time and repeatedly against Assad and the war that he has waged against his own people. The significant efforts expended first by Kofi Annan and then by Lakhdar Brahimi as joint UN and Arab League special envoys unfortunately have not brought about the end to the violence that we seek. For more than a year, I have been speaking to people who personally know Assad, and I have asked them what kind of man he is. These are people who have seen him up close, who have worked with him, people who have sought to seek peace between Syria and Lebanon, at the UN, the International Peace Institute, or other foreign minister colleagues of mine who have worked with him for many years. Just about every single one of them has said that Assad will fight to the bitter end. Unfortunately, I have seen nothing to convince me otherwise.

Obviously, we want to see him held accountable for his terrible actions. Last year, I said very clearly that what Assad needs to be facing is the International Criminal Court to face charges for committing crimes against humanity. Having said that, in many respects it will be up to the Syrian people to determine how he is tried and where. It is also up to Syrians to decide what replaces his regime.

Significant sanctions have come from Canada and like-minded allies or the Arab League. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation has also played an effective role. I am very pleased to say Canada for the first time recently appointed a representative to engage with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation in Jeddah. Significant sanctions, while having devastated the Syrian economy, have not proven effective at causing this regime to change course. Assad is waging war against his own people. These sanctions are crippling the Syrian economy and it does not appear that he could care less about the effect of these sanctions. He has some support in the country; whether it is 10%, 20% or 30%, I do not know. He is getting material support from a number of countries, including Iran, which is another reason this government declared it a state sponsor of terrorism. However, the sanctions have not worked.

● (1925)

Canada, I should note, has not at all sat idle. In fact, Canada will be chairing and hosting the next Syria sanctions committee meeting here in Canada. I and others in government have worked very hard with the Friends of the Syrian People International Working Group to develop a united front and aid for the political action against Assad. Canada has helped address the most urgent humanitarian needs within Syria, while also working to assist Syria's neighbours to deal with the crush of refugees and other effects of this crisis.

In many respects, this is the worst crisis this century has seen, only 13 years in. Canada, I am pleased to say, has been a world leader, not only in making pledges of financial support but in delivering on

those pledges. Canada is well known for that. We are delivering support, aid and humanitarian assistance to the victims of the Assad regime.

My colleague from Toronto Centre mentioned the crisis in Haiti and compared it to the crisis in Syria. It is hard to compare one crisis with another. I know that in that crisis, in five minutes, a quarter of a million people died. In five minutes, one-quarter of a million human beings lost their lives in our hemisphere. In Syria, Assad has been vicious. The war has had a terrible effect, but it has gone on over a long, protracted period of over two years now. It is hard to compare the humanitarian crisis in Haiti with the slow descent into hell the Syrian people have witnessed.

We have pressed countries, such as Russia and China, that have influence with this regime to do all they can to end the bloodshed and support a transition of power. We saw one glimmer of hope in discussions in Geneva, what was called the Geneva declaration or the Geneva initiative, which Russia saw reason to support. We continue to think that it is one element of a political solution.

We have called for resolutions and have pushed for real action within the United Nations system. While the Security Council has utterly failed, the UN has had some good successes. I would note the great job the United Nations World Food Programme is doing in Syria. Canada, by and large, is generally the second-largest contributor to that organization. We have provided financial support to the World Food Programme to support both people inside Syria and those who have sought refuge in neighbouring countries.

Valerie Amos and her staff at the UN have done a phenomenal job with the United Nations' humanitarian response and in getting urgent assistance to those who need it most. I do not mind criticizing the United Nations when I think their actions are wanting, but I am equally proud to say congratulations to the United Nations when they do good and effective work. Frankly, when it comes to the registration of refugees, if the United Nations does not step in to do that, there is really no one else that can fill that void. They have done it, and they have done it well, in my personal, first-hand experience in Syria and Jordan.

Canada has, I am pleased to say, helped address the needs throughout the region. Obviously, if we can provide humanitarian support to people in Syria, the four million-odd people who have been internally displaced, they do not have to seek refuge. However, it is hard. It is very hard to get aid to the people who need it most.

Not too long ago, I travelled to Luxembourg, where I and nine other foreign ministers met with 10 international aid organizations: the World Food Programme, other UN bodies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the European humanitarian assistance folks. We talked. I am told by the UN World Food Programme that there are times when for four, five, six or seven days they are not allowed to get food out of Damascus. On the days they can get it out, there are 51 different checkpoints, with two signatures required. It has been brutal. Thirty people, some from the UN, some from other organizations, have lost their lives trying to get help to people within Syria.

S. O. 52

• (1930)

We have paid particular attention to the pressing needs in Jordan. That has been deliberate. The influx of refugees to Jordan has been nearly overwhelming. To put it in context, my dear friend and colleague, the Foreign Minister of Jordan, Nasser Judeh, put it this way: It is like the entire population of Canada seeking refuge in the United States. Already more than 10%, 11% or 12% of the population of Jordan are Syrian refugees. It causes huge problems in access to water and sanitation. Internal social problems, such as schooling and people taking employment from other Jordanians, are huge. They are significant.

The need for food, medicine and other basics have tapped a government that was already experiencing extreme budget pressures. Indeed, Jordan does not have the developed economy some other countries in the region do. It is not resource rich. The average Jordanian can afford just a third of what the average Turk can, for instance. The situation is very different for Jordan than it is for Turkey, and the need is greater than in some other places.

Canada is delivering. I have personally visited all of Syria's neighbours. I am continuously taking stock of what the needs are and what we can do to be of help. Canada is a rare donor country in that it not only pledges to help out, it actually delivers. This is something government colleagues will elaborate on throughout tonight's presentations.

My friend from Toronto Centre says that we are not doing enough. How could we possibly do enough when we are seeing the biggest humanitarian crisis of the century? Whatever we are doing, it is not enough, and we have to do more. As this crisis drags on, we will do more.

We know that when it comes to humanitarian assistance, getting people and goods to the places they are most needed is a challenge. The World Food Programme, for instance, is doing a great job, as I mentioned.

I am also pleased to report that Canada is at the forefront of thinking about and considering solutions to the challenge of Syria's sizeable stockpile of chemical weapons. We have all seen recent reports, some of them conflicting, about their possible use. While it would appear almost certain that some of these deadly weapons were, in fact, used in recent days, we do not yet know for sure who used them, where they were used and exactly when.

I will leave the rush to judgment to others, but I firmly believe that on a question as important as this, we need precision and clarity. We need to get the facts before responding. President Obama has outlined the importance of this too, and I agree.

About one month ago, we extended a line of credit to the United Nations chemical weapons inspectors to try to get these important answers and elusive facts. Once we get these facts, we will consult with our allies.

American leadership will, of course, be key. So too will the actions of other key allies, such as the United Kingdom, France and Germany. Regional powers, including Turkey and Jordan, will also need to be part of the response. The stakes could not be higher.

We, responsible nations everywhere, cannot allow these chemical weapons stockpiles to fall into the wrong hands. Even small doses unleashed in tight spaces can wreak havoc and cause mass casualties within minutes. This is a concern from Tel Aviv to Tokyo to Toronto, and all points in between.

Our collective response must be firm. We must speak with one voice on this matter. We must understand that failure is not an option.

While we engage with like-minded states on this important question, we also work and engage with various factions, such as the opposition within Syria. Let us remind ourselves that this is not one homogenous body ready to replace Assad and his thugs, which only complicates an already difficult situation.

My friend from Toronto has in recent days asked publicly for more information about the makeup of the opposition. Others have asked why we do not recognize them and back them blindly. We have engaged with the opposition. I have met with their leadership. Canadian officials have met with their leadership. We engage with them, whether they be in Istanbul, Cairo or London.

Let me be clear. We have very credible information to suggest that in recent months, the number of Salafists, jihadists, radical extremists and those who express links to al Qaeda has only increased. This was said by my colleague opposite. They have come to Syria, backed by foreign money, to fight other foreign nationals, Hezbollah and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard among them. These are not people seeking peace for Syria. These are people looking to wage new wars based on old hatred in the lawless, ungoverned space that is today's Syria. We have gone from being concerned about whether there will be a place for religious minorities, whether they be Shia, Kurds, Alawites, Christians, Druze or Ismailis, to what we can do to make sure these people are not slaughtered when Assad falls.

• (1935)

It is no longer a "nice to have" notion of pluralism. It is a matter of survival for those who may not appreciate the imposition of Sharia law, Islamic courts and brands of religious extremism that deny women and minorities their basic human dignity.

Already we have seen the destabilizing effects in the border areas. I would point to the kidnapping of four UN peacekeepers, Philippine nationals, in recent hours and days. Already we see signs of problems that have worsened over years threatening to get suddenly much worse.

In conclusion, Canada will work with our allies to deal with all of this as best we can. We appreciate the support of all hon. members as this debate continues tonight and in the days and weeks ahead. I urge everyone to keep in mind the innocent who have been killed or displaced already, those many millions of Syrians who yearn for brighter futures, and perhaps especially the children affected by this crisis, children who simply want to go home.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for his intervention and clarification on some points with regard to the government's actions. However, there are a couple of things I want to tie down.

I know that everyone has read the reports. I have some Security Council reports here. I will get into this a bit more, but I note the horrific toll this conflict has had on children and women. Typically, women and children are injured or are refugees as an outcome of war. However, we are now seeing that they are being strategically targeted, and I want to get the government's comment on that.

I also have a specific question about cluster munitions.

The member talked about chemical weapons. We have reports from different sources, going back to March, on the use of cluster munitions. I note that the Conservative government has not come out against the use of cluster munitions or made comment on it. I know that the government is against the use of them, but I want to know why we have not spoken out when it comes to cluster munitions in Syria.

Hon. John Baird: Mr. Speaker, let me take the opportunity to do that now.

I think we are speaking very loudly and clearly. We have legislation before Parliament right now to sign the international convention. Obviously, Canada feels very strongly about the use of these munitions.

The member opposite mentioned women and children. We have put financial resources into UNICEF of more than \$2.7 million. UNICEF is on the ground in the refugee camps. We realize the anger and frustration in these camps. People have had to leave their homes, and the huge effect it has on children is self-evident. I ended my comments on that.

The member also mentioned women. We are increasingly seeing around the world rape being used as a weapon of war. There are significant and serious reports from Syria. This is an issue about which Canada and our allies have spoken loudly and clearly. We are putting financial resources on the table for other conflicts, and we are more than prepared to do that here. We spoke at the G8 ministers meeting, where the United Kingdom made this a centrepiece. Canada put up millions of dollars in new financial resources, and it is something we are keen to be engaged with in Syria.

Rape as a weapon of war is a serious war crime. It is something we are beginning to see the civilized world wake up to, take note of and take action on.

● (1940)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just a few months ago there was a delegation of Syrian Canadians from the community who were going through the hallways and talking to a lot of us. Some met with the minister. One of things they were asking for was the guiding principles and rationale, where helping people in desperate circumstances is part of Canada's proud humanitarian tradition. Canada has always played an important international role in alleviating problems and finding solutions to the plight of diaspora worldwide.

S. O. 52

Our recent and distant Canadian history is full of generous and brave actions to resettle refugees from crisis zones worldwide, from 60,000 Vietnamese, to 20,000 Iraqis, to all kinds of special measures, to uplift more than 5,000 Kosovar refugees in 1999, the Lebanese immigration refugee wave of the seventies, and other bright examples of principles and successful policies.

The minister spoke about what he has seen, the girl and everything that he visited. The question that has been put to the government time and time again is, is Canada running any special programs for Syrian refugees?

I took the liberty of communicating with the Canadian embassy in Amman and the Canadian embassy in Beirut. After three tries, I received an answer to my question. Many of my constituents are asking if we are running any special programs for Syrian refugees. Lo and behold, surprise, I figured that the government would. The minister is going to Turkey and saying, "we are taking refugees and we are doing this". The answer is at this time there are no, I repeat, no special programs for Syrian refugees.

If the minister would give his crocodile tears today about the girl that he met, why is he not working with his colleague, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism to make sure that there is yes, a Syrian refugee program? He can continue, but the answer will still be no. When are the Conservatives going to do something about it?

Hon. John Baird: Mr. Speaker, we had a very classy, thoughtful debate and it had to end at one time. It ended just now. I will get the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism to speak to this.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I appreciate the humanity that was evident in his remarks.

In Quebec, especially, I have met a number of families of Syrian origin who told me about Canadians who are stuck in Syria right now because their child was born there. The father and mother are Canadians, but the child is Syrian.

I can recall quite clearly that we allowed Canadian families to get visas for their immediate family during the Israeli-Lebanese conflict. I would like to know if my colleague will work with the Minister of Immigration so that we can bring these Canadian families here, as well as persecuted minorities, including Christians, Kurds, Assyrians and certain refugees—in fact, refugees in general.

I understand that Canada cannot take in everyone under the sun, but it could welcome and protect a certain number of refugees, including the little girl the minister mentioned. It would be a truly great gift to humanity.

Hon. John Baird: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the remarks by the hon. member from Quebec. I appreciated the tone and spirit of her comments.

S. O. 52

If she would like, I would be willing to speak with her about this policy after question period tomorrow. Our concern is not just about the current refugees, but also about what will happen with the Christians, the Druze, the Alawites and the Ismailis after Assad leaves the government.

That is one of our biggest concerns and something we are increasingly focusing on. Not only do I appreciate her question, but I also appreciate the vast majority of the comments in her brief speech, with which I completely agreed.

•(1945)

[English]

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for his speech.

The Liberal foreign affairs critic mentioned that he thought Canada should be engaging the Syrian opposition in a more comprehensive way. The minister spoke a bit about the Syrian opposition in his speech.

When the foreign affairs committee did a study on Syria late last year, we were told by a very well-placed individual who was very well-informed about the Syrian opposition, that the Syrian opposition could be described as having almost 100 identifiable groups that fell into three broad categories: those who were fighting for democracy, human rights, freedom and rule of law, the kind of people we would want to support; terrorists; and the criminal element, taking advantage of the chaos in the country.

I understand that recently the Syrian rebel group, Jabhat al-Nusra, led by Chief Abu Mohammad al-Golani, pledge allegiance to al Qaeda. Given that situation with the Syrian opposition, perhaps the minister could tell us how Canada is dealing with who to support in the Syrian opposition?

Hon. John Baird: Mr. Speaker, let me say at the outset that the overwhelming majority of the Syrian people are peace-loving people who reject radical extremism. That has certainly been the case in my experience, personally and otherwise.

We have engaged with the leadership of the Syrian opposition. I have met with them personally on more than one occasion. My officials have met with them. Our officials engage with them, whether it be in Istanbul, Cairo or most recently in London.

A year ago, we were concerned about a few hundred al Qaeda sympathizers. It has grown to something much worse. This obviously causes Canada, Canadians, the people of Syria and freedom-loving people everywhere significant concern.

Canada has made the decision not to recognize them. I would say that six months after we made that decision, it looks demonstrably better than it did then.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise with a heavy heart, like many in this place, as we debate again the situation in Syria. I say “again” because we have dealt with the issue before. Some things have changed, but obviously not enough, as we have heard from our colleagues.

When we hear of the deaths of 70,000, refugee numbers of 1.5 million, 4.25 million displaced and 6.8 million in need of humanitarian assistance, it is really hard to get our heads around this.

We understand there is a desperate need for humanitarian assistance. We understand that the refugee crisis is getting worse. We understand that we have a government in Damascus that is deciding to stay put and continue with its crimes against humanity. We understand that there is a civil war that is getting worse in many ways. However, we have to understand what we can do.

All too often in our parliaments and our legislatures around the world we are given all the reasons why we cannot do things. If we just take a look at the first three months of 2013, the number of Syrian refugees more than doubled because we, seemingly, could not figure out what to do. Let us remember, this is a conflict that has been going on for a couple of years.

In January, there were around 500,000 refugees. By April, there were more than 1.3 million who fled to neighbouring countries, as we have heard. The United Nations refugee council is saying that it registers 7,000 new refugees every day. More than 440,000 Syrians have fled to Lebanon. Syrian refugees now make up more than 10% of its population.

We also know the burden that has on other countries. Therefore, what we have to do is understand what is possible. I am going to touch on some of the issues that have brought us to this point, but let us go back to last October. That is when the foreign affairs committee was seized with this issue. Frankly, it was our party that pushed to have hearings on Syria and the government agreed, which was helpful. We did a study at the foreign affairs committee because we needed to better understand from Syrian Canadians, from experts and certainly from the government, what we were doing and what we could be doing. From that study we put forward a motion to ask the government to do a couple of things. One was to deal with family reunification, to fast-track those Syrians stuck in the refugee camps who had fled the slaughter in Syria to be sponsored by family members here in Canada. The other thing we asked was to increase humanitarian support, particularly in Turkey.

I listened carefully to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who quite rightly noted that there is a burden on Jordan to take in so many refugees. It is a country that is not as well off, certainly, as Canada. He mentioned helping Lebanon as well.

However, it is important to underline here that out of that committee report came a motion that was debated in the House. We underlined the importance of Turkey. I am critical of the government for not following up on both of those suggestions because when it comes to refugees and reunification, his colleague, the Minister of Immigration, made an announcement in Turkey to suggest that we were going to take in 5,000 refugees. This was good news for many of us when we first heard it. Sadly, we found out when we looked into the announcement that it was not for Syrian refugees leaving the slaughter in Syria, it was for refugees who had already been documented from other countries.

S. O. 52

● (1950)

We do have a proud tradition in this country of accommodating and helping people who are fleeing strife, be it natural disaster in Haiti, as was mentioned, conflict like Lebanon in the 1980s or the infamous stories of those who fled Southeast Asia in the late 1970s and early 1980s. I have heard the minister tonight say he will talk to his colleague, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism. I do not understand why the minister himself, on two occasions, did not meet with the community when asked to. I am talking about the minister's colleague, not the minister. I look forward to his following up.

However, the other thing that has to be noted in this debate tonight, going back to my comments, is that we are all seized with this issue and often paralyzed because we do not believe there is anything more we can do. This is something we can do. We have Syrian Canadian families right now who want to help their family members. Members should think of it right now as if it was their family member who fled conflict. If members could help them out, they would do it. That is all these people are asking for. That is all we are asking for. That is why people have signed the petition asking the government to do just that, to meet with members of the community and to open our doors and our hearts to people fleeing the slaughter.

We need to do more and, in the spirit of having a debate where we are focused on concrete solutions, we need to acknowledge, as in my intervention with the minister, the burden this has been particularly on children. There are UN officials who have said that children and women are on the front lines of this war.

I mentioned in October that we had committee hearings on Syria, and we heard from Syrian Canadians and from experts. We heard from Mariam Hamou, a very proud Syrian Canadian woman, and I think anyone who was at the committee will remember her testimony in particular because it was so human. As I said, sometimes it is difficult to get one's head around the numbers, but in her testimony in the committee hearings she said:

Assad's offensives on his citizens are claiming on average 150 people a day.

This was back in October. She continued:

On October 17—that's yesterday—155 people were killed. On October 16, 133 people were killed. On October 15, 100 people were killed. You get the idea here, and this is just in the past few days. The latest report is that regime forces are using barrel bombs in civilian areas, specifically on schools, killing most of the children inside. The barrel bombs are, again, not in Free Syrian Army stronghold areas, but are targeting children specifically.

I apologize that there is some vivid language here, but she went on to say:

Torture has been reported in every city and town, and down to every family. I don't want to get into the chilling details of what goes on, but I'll share with you one story that just sends chills down my spine. Women are being systematically raped in Syria, not by one, two, or three of the militia men, but by many people. After the militia men are finished raping the victim, they insert a live mouse...[into the woman] to destroy any sense of dignity that might have been left for this woman.

Children are not only dying by the hands of the regime's brutality, but by malnourishment, as food and water are becoming increasingly scarce. Food costs in Syria have gone up six times the price of what they were before the revolution. A loaf of bread is becoming increasingly unaffordable, and families are going without food at times. Babies are dying as mothers are not able to breastfeed them because of the lack of nutrition for the mothers...

That is what we are talking about. That is the human story. We heard from the minister on his visit to the refugee camp. It is clear that there is a need to do more. It is clear there are challenges, no question. I am heartened by the fact that there might be an international conference to actually end this war. However, we must be vigilant and we must do everything we can do.

● (1955)

With that in mind, I have spoken, as we all have, to Syrian Canadians and others, including experts. In fact, I just spoke with someone who is out of Washington today, but whose expertise is around peace, security and women, which is the issue for our century to look at. The issue is how we can ensure that women are not on the front lines of the conflict but are also involved in making sure we find peace, because all too often they are the victims and not allowed in, so to speak.

To that end, not only does the NDP want the government to fast-track family members and increase aid, particularly to countries like Turkey where we should do more, but also focus on women. To that end, New Democrats want the government to engage with the Syrian Women's Network. This is a group of women, civil society members and leaders, working to ensure they can do everything they can to help civilians right now, not only in the camps but in Syria, and to strengthen the hope that everyone had at the beginning of this two years ago that there are going to be opportunities for all.

That is something Canada can do, and we should do it in the following framework. We should do it by saying that our government will lead by engaging Syrian Canadians, those who have expertise and, as I said in my comments earlier, who have already spent their own money to help people on the ground. Some have gone into the conflict zones themselves not to wage war but to work in makeshift hospitals, deliver food aid, help kids, to do what they can with what they have the best way they can.

To that end, New Democrats want the government to have a particular focus on women, work with the Syrian Women's Network and look at putting together a network of Syrian Canadians who will be able to strengthen civil society and opportunities for a lasting political solution. Make no mistake, if tomorrow there were an end to the conflict as we see it now, it does not mean peace and stability. It means that the next phase will happen. As Canadians, we have to make sure we are doing everything we can to prepare for what the next steps are.

S. O. 52

It is clear when we look at what happened in Iraq and even in Libya that we must ensure we are ready and prepared to help on the ground when things change, with basic things such as water and sewage, ensuring basic services are met and basic governance. I know, the minister knows and everyone in the House knows that there are Syrian Canadians who are willing and able to do that. We can work with women's organizations, the Syrian Women's Network and Syrian Canadians, coordinate their efforts, both human resources and money, to look at how we can help immediately on the ground, to strengthen the institutions that are already doing work through the UN and others, and to start looking at what Canada's role will be when this conflict ends. Every conflict ends. Every war ends. It is just a matter of when it ends. Then the question is what we do about it.

I know the Minister of Foreign Affairs is a fan of Churchill. During the Second World War, which my father served in overseas, in 1942, I believe it was, he was already planning for what would happen in post-war Germany. He had some of the best and the brightest looking at what needs and services would be required and who would be able to fill that role. It was because he understood that wars and conflicts end. Then the question was what to do and what one's contribution would be. The question is: What is Canada's contribution going to be?

We should look at the challenges we face, such as who is being affected by this war and the huge toll this has taken on civilians, particularly women and children, as I have underlined in my comments.

● (2000)

Just to give an example of what this means for women, not only are they affected by becoming refugees and having to leave their homes and take care of their children without enough resources to support them, but we have evidence that there are as many as 6,400 women who have been detained by the regime. One thousand of them are university students.

Let us remember who started this movement. This was not malicious, from outside. This was not people who picked up arms. This was a peaceful movement of young people—not entirely but primarily—who decided they wanted a different Syria. They led, in this response to the government's crackdown, by protesting peacefully, not by picking up guns, not by using any so-called terrorist methods. They simply used their passion, their hearts and their drive.

What has happened is that many of them have been killed and many of them have been detained. We understand that Syrian women and children who have been affected are targeted, as I read in this testimony. Can members imagine targeting schools? Many of us have worked as teachers or have kids, and we all grew up and went through the system. To think that someone is actually targeting a school is beyond comprehension. It is a horror. That is why I think we should be engaging to do more with those who have been engaged on the ground.

I want to finish up by saying, while the world watches what happens in Syria and wonders what else we can do, let us remember what this country has done in the past.

I remember a story of a couple who were over here in the Laurentian Mountains for a weekend. They were horrified as they watched South Asians in boats and saw the news reports. They saw that they were in peril, that they needed help, and the world was not opening its doors.

That couple came back to this city and they got in touch with the government. They held some public meetings, and they opened the minds of the government of the day, which was a Conservative government. They said we must do more. They held local meetings where people—church groups, bowling teams and others—sponsored refugees, to help those people who were on the high seas and who were being left behind.

That couple was my parents. My mother was the mayor of Ottawa at the time. It was a grassroots movement that said that as Canadians we have something to do. She called it Project 4000. It opened the doors to 4,000 Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotian refugees here in this city, and challenged every other mayor across the country to do the same.

We went from having a quota of 8,000 refugees for that year. Because of grass roots and because Canadians mobilized and said we could do something about this, it changed to 60,000. It was Flora MacDonald who was the minister who did that.

I say to the government and to Canadians that we can do more, we can do it together and we can show Syrians that we are here to help with that. We can say to the world that Canada cannot solve the problem, but we can do our bit. I think if we support refugees, if we do a little more in humanitarian support, and we decide that we are going to engage all Syrians who can help with civil society, with women, supporting women in particular, Canada will be proud of what it can do in a horrific, awful conflict.

● (2005)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have had three speakers in this debate, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Liberal Foreign Affairs critic, and now the NDP Foreign Affairs critic, and all of them have very passionately stated the human tragedy that is taking place in Syria. There is no question about it. All three have said that what is happening in Syria is totally unacceptable, and that is not just the war, but the misery that is going on there. All of them have given their personal examples to say and show where all these things are leading.

It is understandable that my colleague talks about engaging with the Canadian Syrian community, and that is indeed what we should be doing and indeed what this government is doing. I am sure all opposition members are engaged with the Syrian Canadian community, who because of their own personal interests have tremendous contributions they can make toward the tragic situation in Syria.

The NDP critic talked about engaging women's networks and setting that up, but at this time the security situation in Syria is disastrous. There is no room for civil society there. There is no room for people to do anything. What we need right now is to bring, as quickly as possible, pressure to stop the civil war, to stop the killing. Only then can we have these things.

I understand what he is talking about, that we want to build this thing—Mr. Speaker, we have 10 minutes for questions, so let me go.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. I will remind the hon. parliamentary secretary that the Chair will determine the length of questions, not the members, and that while there are 10 minutes available, the member has gone for almost two minutes now and I would ask him to wrap up quickly.

The hon. parliamentary secretary has the floor.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, the question I want to put is very simple. While the member is talking about building capacity, let me say quite clearly and very strongly that this government is focused on helping to build capacity with the national council that can form the government and provide the stability he is talking about. Then we can all work together to do that.

• (2010)

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, I think I addressed my comments to the fact that I think we should be doing more. I acknowledge the announcements that the government has made and the money it has invested in helping refugees, et cetera, but there is more that we have to do. This is not a partisan issue. This is about our country and what we can do. That is what this debate is about. It is about informing and sharing ideas, and hopefully coming up with the next steps in terms of what we can do.

I would acknowledge that the government, particularly at the beginning, has donated and invested money in the plight of refugees. I am saying that Canadians want to do even more. Let us use that opportunity. Let us engage with Canadians and do even more. Let us understand that this conflict has taken a huge hit on women and children, and we need to look at their plight and invest with them. It sounds like the parliamentary secretary agrees with me, so I look forward to the government's response on that, as well as with the fast-tracking of refugees.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of this situation in Syria, we from this side, the community and NGOs, are asking the government to match dollar-for-dollar what they raise. This has been done for many occasions. It was done for the earthquake in Gujarat. It was done for the tsunami. It was done for the earthquake in 2005 in Pakistan, and it continues. The government even reluctantly a couple of times went ahead and did that. I remember the time that we had the earthquake in China, and we had to push the minister at that time. Of course, we forgot the \$16 orange juice. We had to push her and push the government in order to do this. When Haiti happened, this House was locked down and the Prime Minister walked right across and said "Here is my donation".

In that spirit that the community has been asking, that the NGOs have been asking, that we in the opposition have been asking, will my hon. colleague agree that the government has failed completely to match dollar-for-dollar the request from the community? The

government is ignoring the Syrian community in Canada, in not only not matching dollar-for-dollar, but also the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism not meeting with them following request after request, in writing to the Prime Minister, who is not ordering his ministers to meet with them.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, we have seen from NGOs that there is more than can be done. I am simply making the point to the government that there is an opportunity to do more if it wishes to. I know that there are willing partners.

It is not in the spirit of the debate tonight to go hot. It is important to critique where critiques need to be made and to offer suggestions.

I know there are people who have already given a lot of money and a lot of time. We can leverage that even more. That is why we are putting forward the idea of creating this network, particularly investing with women in the Syrian women's network.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to give my colleague an opportunity to talk about a motion that was passed unanimously in the House of Commons. The motion followed a study by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development on the situation in Syria.

The hon. members of the government may need to be reminded of the recommendations made to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the resolution that my colleague presented in committee. I would like him to talk about the recommendations that the government passed.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, I mentioned some of this in my comments. In October of last year, we decided it was important to actually have the foreign affairs committee, of which I am a vice-chair, study what is happening in Syria and hear directly from people. I read some of the testimony into the record.

From that, we got some good ideas about what we should do next. We had a motion and we debated it in the House, and as she mentioned, the motion was passed unanimously. It said three things. One was to acknowledge and support the UN mission, which was already touched on by my colleague from Toronto Centre. That was Mr. Brahimi's mission. We noted that they were not going to find a peace accord tomorrow, but it was important to have UN presence there for all sorts of reasons, the least of which is for what happens when the conflict is over. It will be important to have knowledge of what is happening on the ground when the conflict is over. The second point was to have the fast-tracking of refugees. Thirdly, we said to provide more humanitarian support.

This was agreed to by the House. I simply remind the government that on two of these issues, it still needs to do more. We encourage the government to do more.

S. O. 52

• (2015)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from Ottawa Centre for his comments and for focusing on what we know to be a dreadful humanitarian crisis.

I am hearing from refugees from Syria in my own community that there are also systematic rapes of women occurring. I cannot verify this, but they are hearing from relatives that rapes are also occurring in the refugee camps, where people are also at risk.

What I would like to ask is whether we should be pushing as hard as possible for a peace process for bringing people to the table, bearing in mind that we would be getting involved in a military conflict where we are not sure which side we would want to see in power?

In that context, does the hon. member think there is some potential for pushing Russia to get Assad to the table for real negotiations with all the players to get to a ceasefire and a peace process?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, recent reports show there is the potential for an international conference. Secretary of State Kerry has just concluded meetings with his counterpart Lavrov, in Moscow, and we are hopeful that an international conference will happen.

It was also noted that there had not been, as there had been in the past, any adherence by Moscow as to what the status of Mr. Assad would be. I say that because this is a bit of a change from what the news reports. There might be other reports that we hear later. There is a sense right now that even Russia is getting concerned and fatigued with the situation in Syria.

What we must do is to be focused on what the member has underlined, that there has to be a political solution to this. Diplomacy should be ramped up and we should ensure that our friends in Russia get the message yet again that it has a role here. It has been supplying arms, everyone knows that, and if this continues, it will be even more culpable than it was before.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Syrians are facing an increasingly desperate situation. More than 80,000 Syrians have been killed so far. Some 4.25 million people have been internally displaced, and over 1.4 million have become refugees. The situation ranks as one of the worst humanitarian disasters on the planet.

In our view, the best and perhaps the only hope to end the suffering of all Syrians is a political solution that would see Assad go, his regime making way for an inclusive Syrian-led transition to a new Syria in which all Syrians' rights are protected and where stability and democracy can thrive.

This ideal is a long way from becoming a reality at this time. It requires a united opposition that will be able to extend its authority over all actors inside Syria, an opposition that is inclusive of minorities, rejects terrorism and extremism, and is committed to building a stable, democratic, pluralistic state for all Syrians.

However, again, that is a long way off. As the Minister of Foreign Affairs noted earlier, the arrival of Salafists, jihadists and people with links to al Qaeda from other countries in even greater numbers only makes the challenge more difficult.

The Syrian Opposition Coalition, or SOC, has made some progress in its attempt to safeguard pluralism and a role for all citizens. The SOC was formed in November of last year in an effort to unite the main factions of the political opposition in a structure that could speak with a single voice. It is an important interlocutor for the international community and is slowly taking steps to bring order out of chaos in parts of Syria it claims to control.

However, much more needs to be done. The SOC continues to struggle with disunity and internal cohesion. In particular, moderates and ethnic and religious minorities do not yet feel adequately represented in the SOC. This is a matter of great concern to Canada.

If the opposition is to turn the page on the tyranny of the Assad regime, it must demonstrate to members of Syria's minority communities that they have a place in the Syrian opposition, that they will have a place in the new Syria, and that their rights will be protected.

Canada also urges the SOC to do more to condemn terrorism and extremism unequivocally.

The proliferation of extremist groups on the ground and an influx of foreign fighters have been of growing concern since the conflict in Syria began. Most deadly among these groups is Jabhat al-Nusra, or JN. Just last month, al Qaeda in Iraq, AQI, announced its merger with JN. We had long been aware of JN's links to AQI, but these had never previously been declared publicly. There is little sympathy among the people of Syria for JN's extreme brand of Islam. In fact, JN was quick to deny the merger, although it still pledged allegiance to al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri.

Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my colleague for Mississauga—Erindale.

Radical jihadists from across the region and around the world are taking advantage of the current crisis so they can establish a new base for—

• (2020)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. The hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Speaker, is the member asking permission to do that?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member is informing the Chair that he is splitting his time.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. He is not asking permission, then.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): In this debate it is not required for members to ask permission to split their time but merely to inform the Chair of that intention.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Thank you, Mr. Speaker,

S. O. 52

Mr. Speaker, once free of Assad's iron grip, the people of Syria must not find themselves further suppressed by those who seek to impose a new tyranny, create sectarian strife, or threaten Syria's neighbours. The opposition must do more to marginalize and weed out extremists. We, as responsible nations, must think long and hard before we consider arming the opposition.

As retired Lieutenant-General Andrew Leslie said in today's *Globe and Mail*, "once you flood the area with such weapons, you have no idea where they'll end up, and no way of getting them back". He said it is "the last thing you want to do".

We agree with him 100%. Certainly Canada has been very clear from the outset of this crisis that we would take a deliberate, considerate and thoughtful approach to all matters relating to support for the Syrian opposition, even if it means that we stand alone among friends.

The situation in Syria is unlike conflict in other places in recent years. It is extremely complex and it is ever changing. While some members opposite would have us rush blindly to recognize the Syrian opposition just because other countries have done so, Canada, under the leadership of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs have said, "Hang on. Let's exercise the appropriate caution and due diligence".

That decision seems more wise the longer that this conflict drags on. Until and unless the SOC becomes more inclusive and does more to reject extremism, Canada will not recognize this body as the legitimate representative of all Syrians. However, this does not mean that we ignore those in the opposition who are truly committed to a better and brighter new Syria for all.

We continue to engage Syrian opposition actors at all levels. The Minister of Foreign Affairs himself has met with Syrian opposition leaders, both here in Ottawa and in the capitals around the world. In December of last year, he appointed a new representative to the Syrian opposition, based in Cairo. We do this to get the best possible first-hand information. We use such opportunities to push for an end to the violence, for a political solution to the conflict, and for a Syrian-led transition to a stable, democratic and pluralistic Syria.

In the new Syria there can be no room for terror and oppression. Respect for basic rights and human dignity must reign. To that end, Canada has actively supported civil administration by grassroots actors who have stepped up to run their own communities in the liberated areas where the regime is no longer providing services.

We have supported accountability efforts to help ensure that reports of war crimes, including cases of rape as a tool of war, can be investigated and that those responsible can eventually be brought to justice. We have supported independent media, which is vital, not only so the Syrians and the international community know the truth of what is occurring in Syria today but as a cornerstone of a future democratic state.

The international community must redouble efforts to support moderate influences in the Syrian opposition. Our government knows this. Canadians know this. We know the value of a functioning pluralistic society because we are fortunate to live in one. We must support those moderate democratic opposition forces that respect the rights of all religions and ethnic groups. These are

the people who will help to create a new Syria in which all Syrians can truly participate and prosper.

The human toll in Syria has been tremendous, and the sacrifice of the opposition has been great. However, the future can be greater.

Canada will continue to work with those who are truly committed to supporting the best interests of all Syrians, as they work toward building for themselves a better and brighter future.

• (2025)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before I go to questions and comments, I want to remind all hon. members that when members split their time there is only five minutes for questions and comments, and we like to get in two questions and comments. I will give you a signal when you are at one minute and would ask you to quickly wrap up in order to allow more members to participate in the debate.

The hon. member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I will abide by that.

I mentioned in my comments that we need to have more of what I call a "people first" policy when it comes to working with civil society and others on the ground, the least of which is with women.

I want to note that Nobel Laureate Jody Williams said, "in Syria, as countless women are again finding the war waged on their bodies —we are again standing by and wringing our hands".

I note that the parliamentary secretary did mention that this is a concern. I wonder what further actions the government will take to deal with this crisis, particularly when it comes to women who are victims, and the children, as I mentioned earlier, of this horrific conflict that is happening in Syria

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, as I stated previously, I do agree with the NDP opposition critic that it is a human tragedy. We must work with everyone who can bring peace and stability to Syria.

To answer the member's question, what Canada is doing most importantly is supporting accountability efforts to help ensure that the reports of war crimes, including cases of rape as a tool of war, can be investigated and that those who are responsible are eventually brought to justice. This is the best we can do, to ensure that those who are responsible cannot escape justice. That is what Canada is doing with the accountability process.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the parliamentary secretary could tell us, given the fact that our mission in Damascus is now closed, what exactly our capacities are in terms of monitoring what is taking place in Syria, as well as monitoring what is taking place in the areas around Syria where the refugees are coming? What is our capacity on the ground right now through the agencies of the Government of Canada?

S. O. 52

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, it is true that we closed down our embassy in Damascus. That was to protect our diplomats, which is a priority for this government, but I would like to tell the hon. member that we work with our allies all across the world, getting information and talking to them, so we are plugged in. We are getting information with all other allies on the ground. We have a very strong network of co-operation with our allies and we get up-to-date information as to what is happening on the ground.

However, we have to take a cautionary note of everything, and we will make a decision based on what facts we have at that given time.

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the other Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the better-looking one of the two.

I would like to ask him about Russia. We have heard some comment in this debate about Russia's intransigence toward supporting a UN Security Council resolution that would bring effective sanctions against the Assad regime.

I understand that President Putin has opened the door to some conversations with Secretary of State Kerry. That sounds encouraging, but perhaps the parliamentary secretary could tell us what more he thinks can be done by the international community to put pressure on Russia to do the right thing and support the UN Security Council resolution against the Assad regime to put the kinds of pressure on the Assad regime that would bring this horrible conflict to an end.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, I thank the other parliamentary secretary for a very good question.

Of course, we were very happy to see that Secretary of State Kerry had gone to Russia and that Russia and the U.S.A. were engaged in talks to bring a solution to this horrible situation in Syria. Of course, I am one who is watching now to see what will happen next at the Security Council.

If there was one word at the Security Council, the message to Assad would be very clear. It would be that the whole international community is opposed to what he is doing, and that would be the strongest message. Assad and his people would get it, and that would hopefully bring him back to the table. All of us are looking for peace in that country.

• (2030)

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening to participate in this most important debate on the crisis in Syria. This is the third time that we have met into the late hours of an evening to discuss this issue, the last time being just five months ago. Sadly, Assad continues to wage war on his very own people and the regime's depravity reaches new heights each and every day.

As focused as we are and should be on the grave and deadly situation facing the Syrian people who are being victimized daily by their own government, the regional implications of this crisis are equally troubling for Canada and for the entire international community.

The war has spilled over into neighbouring countries in many different ways, and it risks fueling broader regional instability. There are now more than 1.4 million refugees spread across Syria's

neighbours, and that number is climbing every day. Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan have borne the brunt of the burden, and they should be commended for their generosity in hosting the hundreds of thousands of Syrians who have fled the carnage. It has been no easy task accommodating such a large influx of desperate people fleeing for their lives, often with little more than the clothes on their backs.

As the minister mentioned in his remarks, the situation in Jordan is particularly challenging. Zaatari refugee camp, constructed to hold 60,000 refugees, now houses more than 100,000, with more arriving every day. According to the UN, it is the second-largest refugee camp in the world. In total, Jordan has taken in around 500,000 refugees, with estimates suggesting that the number could reach 1.2 million by the end of this year. This would equal around one-fifth of Jordan's population.

The international community is doing what it can to alleviate the burden, and our government continues to do its part. In Jordan, for example, our support directly to the Jordanian armed forces has helped them cope with the refugee situation and prepare them for the risk of chemical weapon usage.

In Turkey, our contribution has provided food, water, shelter and winter clothing to as many as 170,000 displaced people at the border. Just this past January, I had the opportunity to visit two of those refugee camps in Turkey, along with the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism. In one camp 25,000 people were living in containers. In another camp 15,000 people were living in tents. The Turkish government was taking very good care of those people: they were being provided with the necessary shelter, food, education for their children, prayer rooms to pray in, and craft facilities to continue to make their crafts in their traditional ways. They were being well cared for.

While we were there, Canada announced further contributions to the support of those refugees in Turkey through the International Red Crescent Society. We met with the head of the International Red Crescent Society in Turkey, who was very pleased with what Canada had offered. We met with Turkey's Minister of Foreign Affairs, who also thanked Canada for its contribution. We met with the chief representative of the UNHCR, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, who asked Canada to continue to support the refugees in those camps but not to bring them out of those camps to Canada at this time because the preference is for those people to go back to their homes when the conflict is over. The international community accepts this as a norm. It does not want any minority groups to be depopulated from a country.

Our hope is always that people will go back to their homes and be able to resume their normal lives. However, if that does not happen when the conflict is over and if people are still in fear for their lives, then of course the international community, including Canada, will resettle those people in other countries.

The refugee burden and the humanitarian needs created by it are only one of the many regional challenges posed by this war. The spillover of this conflict into Syria's neighbours poses real risk to the stability of a very volatile part of the world.

We are obviously deeply concerned by the number of cross-border military incidents in this war. Syrian shelling into Turkey and the outbreak of street fighting in Lebanon between factions supporting one side or the other of the Syrian conflict, for example, have tested the patience and at times the stability of Syria's neighbours.

The risk to Israel cannot be ignored, particularly given reports surfacing today that the Syrian government has authorized groups supporting it to launch attacks on Israel across the Golan Heights. We strongly believe that Israel has a right to defend itself and its people from terrorist threats.

While the risk of spillover conflict has been contained for now, the region is on alert. The longer this war continues, the greater the risk of regional escalation. Working through NATO, we supported our ally, Turkey, in its efforts to bolster its defensive capabilities, including through the deployment of Patriot missile batteries.

• (2035)

One thing is clear: Assad's desperation deepens, and he is not alone in this fight. Standing behind him offering immediate and valuable support are Hezbollah and its principal patron, Iran. Together, Iran and Hezbollah have given Assad important assistance and a needed boost to morale leaving the regime less vulnerable and isolated than it otherwise would have been. By bolstering the regime's capability, resilience and intransigence, Iran and Hezbollah have Syrian blood on their hands.

While troubling, the involvement of both is not surprising. Iran and Hezbollah have track records that are fully consistent with the kind of deadly destabilizing role they are playing in Syria. Hezbollah have their fingerprints on terrorist outrages across the globe. Hezbollah is, plain and simple, a terrorist organization. We have listed it as such and we have urged other countries to do the same. The Iranian regime, too, has again shown its true colours in Syria. Desperate to ensure the survival of one of its few remaining allies, Iran has provided support and encouragement to Assad. Having brutally crushed its own democracy movement in 2009, Iran has now taken on the Syrian people and their quest for freedom. The Iranian regime has always been about oppression. Its backing of the Assad tyranny provides yet again clear evidence of the despicable and brutal nature of that regime. While we are confident that the new Syria, when it has finally won its freedom, will reject the views and goals of al Qaeda, it could be a deadly and long struggle against an entity bolstered by its successes in Syria. This will be a challenge for the region as a whole going forward.

Our government has been consistent and clear. We have urged the opposition and the Free Syrian Army to distance themselves from this kind of sectarianism and the terrorists who use it, and instead embrace fully the tradition of diversity and tolerance that has marked Syrian history for millennia.

The war in Syria is a test for the region and Syria's neighbours are on the front line. The risks are plenty and the longer the war continues, the greater the challenges will be. Canada will continue to watch these events closely, and we will do our part to ensure that the stability of the region is not threatened.

S. O. 52

[Translation]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his speech.

Obviously, the situation in Syria is terrible, and I do not think we can say it enough. At the same time, it is very complex. There are various groups involved, as the minister said, and those groups are not homogenous, which makes the whole situation that much more difficult.

We are dealing with a complex situation. Yes, we are taking action, but it will never be enough in light of all the violence being perpetrated against the Syrian people, particularly women and children, who, as we know, are among the most affected and the most vulnerable.

What clear and tangible action has Canada taken to promote and protect the women and children of Syria?

[English]

Mr. Bob Dechert: Mr. Speaker, Canada is very concerned about the treatment of women and children, especially with the reports of the use of rape as a tool of war. Canada has CIDA officials on the ground in most of the refugee camps in Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, and in other places. CIDA is supporting NGOs that treat the victims of such violence, hear their stories, document their stories and ensure that those stories can be brought forward for justice through the International Criminal Court when this crisis ends. Canada will continue to do everything possible to protect the vulnerable through humanitarian aid to the Syrian refugee camps and through a special program to support women and children who have been exposed to that kind of violence.

• (2040)

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a number of other countries have used NGOs effectively to provide assistance inside Syria. Canada seems to have been very reluctant to do that. I wonder if the parliamentary secretary could comment on that.

Certainly, the perception of members of the community here in Canada is that their efforts to provide assistance directly to people inside Syria have gone ahead, but the Government of Canada has been reluctant to provide support for those efforts. Could the parliamentary secretary comment on that?

Mr. Bob Dechert: Mr. Speaker, there have been situations where the Government of Canada has been concerned about the organizations that have come forward to ask Canada for support. Some of them may be engaged in the violence on either side, especially on the rebel side. It is not Canada's position that we ought to be arming and furthering the violence. What Canada has done, very importantly, is supported the UN World Food Programme in Syria.

I have a quote from an article written on April 7 of this year, in which Muhannad Hadi, the UN World Food Programme's emergency coordinator inside Syria, said, "Canada has certainly played its part in contributing \$48 million towards the crisis." The article went on to state:

WFP officials say Canada has already contributed generously, and that its early response was critical in the early stages of the refugee crisis.... "We're grateful to the Canadian people and the Canadian government for all the support," said [Muhannad Hadi].

S. O. 52

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think it was George Bernard Shaw who said, “Revolutions have never lightened the burden of tyranny: they have only shifted it to another shoulder”.

I wonder if the parliamentary secretary could talk about whether or not he feels there is a unified coalition on the side of the Free Syrian Army. Are there people there who are prepared to take government should the opportunity show itself?

Mr. Bob Dechert: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary is right. There are people who are willing to take the reins of the government of Syria and to do it in a way that respects the human rights of minority groups. There are, though, organizations and groups fighting with the rebel forces against the Assad regime that support al Qaeda.

We heard from a very highly placed individual at the foreign affairs committee late last year that there were over 100 identifiable groups within the Syrian rebel coalition, and many of those are not the types of people Canada would want to support. They are not the kinds of people who would protect the rights of minorities. We must be very careful in determining who we should be supporting in that conflict.

[Translation]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to a topic we debated in the House a year ago. At the time, 9,000 people had died and a few thousand people had been displaced. Today, the situation is even more grim: 70,000 people have died and there are more than 1.4 million refugees. In Syria, 4.2 million people have been displaced within the country. These figures are from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The conflict is spreading throughout the region. Syria is becoming a ticking time bomb, and an entire region, which is already very unstable, is at risk of falling into an unending spiral of violence. The number of victims is growing. Jihadists are gradually overtaking the restrained political-military opposition, and a regional political-religious system would certainly not be a good idea.

Groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra, which appears to have ties to al Qaeda, or Al-Tali'a, among dozens of other Salafist groups, are growing in power. They come from all over and want to create an Islamic emirate. On the other side, Bashar al-Assad's forces are receiving increased support through the heightened presence of Hezbollah, funded by Iran, which raises concerns about an interfaith war based on the Sunni-Shiite conflict, which would be very detrimental to peace in Syria and in other countries.

This presents a very complicated ethical dilemma for us. The dangers of inaction and the dangers of intervention are uncertain, but in the meantime, people are suffering. We must put these people first when we are deciding whether to act. My colleague from Ottawa Centre already mentioned this, but I think it is worth repeating. The countries surrounding Syria are receiving countless numbers of refugees, but this government is not doing anything and is refusing to expedite the reunification process for Syrian families, as we did in the past for Haiti.

I want to remind the government that the House voted on a resolution to take two simple actions: increase humanitarian aid for

refugees and speed up the processing time for family reunification. There should also be an emphasis on providing support to the UN mission. It is important to know that when the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development conducted its study, it learned that the government would not be renewing its contribution to the mission. It is also important to mention that the government did in fact vote in favour of that mission. This government's modus operandi is inaction, not action, as the minister claimed in his speech.

Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey are the countries currently receiving the most refugees. In Turkey alone, four new camps are currently being built. Turkey is even building schools for refugee children. We can all agree that the countries that are welcoming all these refugees are seriously lacking resources, and Canada has a leadership role to play in that regard.

On April 25, Jordan sent a letter to the Security Council. The letter mentioned that the massive influx of refugees was threatening the security and stability of the country, and could also have an impact on international peace and security. The crush of refugees in Lebanon could also destabilize the country at a time when armed conflict already regularly opposes supporters and opponents of the Syrian regime in Tripoli in northern Lebanon, where religious divisions follow conflict lines.

When is this government going to provide more aid as pressure on these countries keeps mounting? These countries need a program for refugees. We have to help them cope with the burden of the Syrian conflict. It is ridiculous that we keep talking about a conflict without ever actually doing anything. This would be a good way to help the neighbouring countries, and also the Syrians. I just want to point out that the Syrian National Council's main request is to reunite the families.

The government is quite inept at foreign affairs, starting with its inability to get a seat at the United Nations Security Council.

● (2045)

As my colleague already mentioned, this council deals with, manages and tries to resolve these types of crises.

Even worse, my colleague from Ottawa Centre and I asked the minister last week about the fact that Canada would not apply for a seat for fear of a humiliating loss. This government's ineptitude has even made it impossible to apply for a seat. It is important to mention this.

Let us be clear. If Canada truly wanted to show leadership in resolving the Syrian crisis, the government should have known that having a seat at the table was the best way to do it.

Today, John Kerry went to Russia to talk about recent events in Syria. I call that active diplomacy. An NDP government would be on the ground and a member of international decision-making bodies.

I wonder what our Prime Minister and our Minister of Foreign Affairs are doing in the meantime to increase the pressure on Russia and China.

S. O. 52

As I have already said in the House, and I am going to repeat it, some meetings have already been held.

The first time that I gave a speech on this crisis, I said that the government was putting its economic relations with powers such as Russia and China ahead of diplomatic relations. Diplomatic relations can resolve conflicts.

The minister said that we need a political solution. I would really like to see the minister take his responsibilities seriously and find a political solution to this conflict. That is not at all what we have seen this past year.

We also know that the government has cut funding for Canadian organizations that could have helped because of their expertise in democracy and human rights, for example. Canada could have been a leader in mapping out the transition to democracy in Syria.

Is the government really ready to support democratic development once the conflict in Syria has ended? We sometimes have our doubts.

As I said, organizations like Rights and Democracy and the Global Peace and Security Fund, for example, which advocate for these kinds of principles, have had their programs eliminated. Why? We may well wonder about Canada's desire to genuinely help Syria return to stability, but above all achieve democracy. For a country that has lived under a dictatorship, it is very important to have the advice of Canadian experts who are recognized worldwide.

This need clearly exists. So why have successive Conservative budgets signed the death warrants for organizations like Rights and Democracy and jeopardized the financial viability of the Global Peace and Security Fund? Why has the government undermined Canada's capacity to be a leader on the international scene? These questions need to be asked in the House.

The NDP continues to call on the government to prioritize protecting civilians, in co-operation with international organizations on the ground like the United Nations and the Syrian humanitarian organizations.

I reiterate that Canada has to work with the Arab League and the United Nations on peace efforts, emergency humanitarian aid and accelerating the family reunification process for Syrians with family in Canada.

I have to address the situation of women and children in this conflict. As the rhetoric surrounding the use of chemical weapons in Syria heats up, the systematic use of sexual violence as a tactic of war is generating relatively little concern, if any. There are organizations collecting data about the sexual assaults being perpetrated in Syria. Unfortunately, a number of international human rights NGOs report that cases of rape are constantly being reported in the refugee camps. Senior representatives of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported that the Syrian conflict was bringing with it a large number of gender-based crimes, as well as the intentional victimization of women and children.

It is therefore extremely important to point out that there is a humanitarian crisis and there are glaring needs.

●(2050)

We are talking about women who are being raped. We do not have to be familiar with these individuals' culture to know how rape can destroy the soul of a community and a culture. That is precisely the reason why sexual violence is used as a weapon of war.

The reports tell us that the conflict is getting worse. Rape and sexual violence are being used as weapons of war to intimidate adversaries in the conflict, in order to destroy dignity, identity and the social fabric, and in fact to suppress any kind of challenge.

Some of the women questioned by the NGOs have reported rape and other forms of sexual violence committed by the pro-government forces when homes are searched, after arrests at checkpoints, and when women are in detention.

My colleague from Ottawa Centre read the moving testimony of a woman who testified as an individual before the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, and we have seen how out of control the situation has become. Something has got to be done.

Some accounts report crimes of this kind committed by armed anti-government groups. Many of the people questioned also talked about the risk of women being abducted by all of the parties to the conflict to get information that could be traded for the release of certain prisoners.

Some women who appeared before the International Federation for Human Rights said that most of them were subsequently excluded. According to several women and organizations offering support services, families sometimes force rape survivors to marry in order to save the family's honour.

The risks the survivors run of being stigmatized and rejected impose a culture of silence that prevents women from reporting the sex crimes they have suffered. Consequently, many of those who need medical and psychosocial support unfortunately do not have access to it. I mentioned in my previous speech that this was a need and that the refugees in the Syrian camps were already desperately lacking support a year ago.

The situation is not getting any better, and it is really time the Conservatives decided to act. We must ensure that adequate funding follows in order to provide front-line services for the refugees' safety and physical and mental health. Post-conflict psychosocial problems tend to be long-lasting, and trauma is transmitted from the mother to the children in the family.

The conflict must therefore be resolved, but provision must also be made for a long-term solution. The mass rape of women as a weapon of war and the trauma the children have suffered are among the problems needing a long-term solution. We have a duty to provide for the protection of refugees, and women and children alone account for 50% of those refugees.

S. O. 52

A UNICEF report entitled *Syria's Children: A lost generation?* describes the conflict's direct impact on the country's children, who have been traumatized by seeing members of their families raped and killed before their very eyes. They are terrified by the sounds and scenes of conflict. A simple noise can suddenly make them relive a bombing. Diseases of the skin and respiratory tract are on the rise, and one school in five has been destroyed or damaged or is being used to house displaced families.

Children run the greatest risk of having their rights violated. They are being mutilated, killed, orphaned or sexually assaulted by rival factions. They are frequently seized by rebel forces at checkpoints and forced into combat.

This state of affairs greatly saddens me. Talking about it today makes me realize how important it is for us to discuss it and to look at measures taken by the government.

This is a cry of hope for Syrians. The government must act and use what little international weight it has left to try to put pressure on Syria or China.

• (2055)

We need to find a political solution to end this crisis. That is what the minister said.

I am asking him and the Prime Minister to please do something. We need to stop watching this situation fester and worsen. Something needs to be done.

The long-term consequences are potentially disastrous for a region that is already extremely unstable. It is no longer a question of simply intervening for the children. Practically an entire generation will be traumatized and shattered. After the conflict—and I hope that day is coming—we will need to think about those children and the help they will need. I am begging the government to stop cuts to organizations, such as Rights and Democracy, that exist for that purpose and work for peace and security. Honestly, given the Conservative government's record, how can we believe that it really wants to help?

There is a lot of bad news coming out of Syria: a number of other countries are intervening in the conflict, there are allegations of the use of chemical weapons and UN peacekeepers have been kidnapped. The conflict seems to have reached a point of no return, and it could spill over the borders and become a regional conflict. As the minister said, it is crucial to find a political solution to this conflict so that a long-term peace process can be implemented with the help of the UN.

Today, I received calls and emails from people asking me to mention the following three points. First, they want their government to take a key role on the international stage to determine a peace process for Syria. Second, they want their government to increase humanitarian aid and support for refugees. Third, they want their government to help reunite families of Syrian-born Canadians.

• (2100)

[English]

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate hearing from my colleague. She is part of the foreign affairs

committee. We have had a number of interventions over the last number of months on the issue of Syria. We had an intervention from Mokhtar Lamani. He was talking about when Mr. Brahimi was in China, talking about China's position, and also talking about being in Russia, but change in the Chinese leadership was making things difficult for discussion.

We also had an intervention from Robert Malley who had some comments for us. He said, "The Arab world faces a period of radical transformation internally and strategically. Getting it right will take persistence and flexibility, determination and creativity, a re-tooled approach toward local parties in the region. It likely will take time. There are no shortcuts."

Could my colleague could talk about whether or not she feels that the work of Mr. Brahimi, the rapporteur, is getting through, or if there is another avenue we need to take? Does the member have some suggestions for a political solution?

[Translation]

Ms. Ève Pécelet: Mr. Speaker, it is important to mention that, in her question, the hon. member quoted someone who was saying that establishing peace will take time because the peace process is long.

Then, the hon. member asked me if I thought that Mr. Brahimi's work is effective. I would like to tell her that a mission like the one that Mr. Brahimi is undertaking can take time. I understand her question, but I would like to tell her that, as she said, a process to achieve peace and stability will take time.

I think that supporting missions, such as those of the UN and Mr. Brahimi, would be a way for Canada to play a leadership role.

[English]

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I remember being in the House during a debate, and it was mentioned at that time that there was inaction by the government in matching dollar for dollar and in engaging the Syrian community. At the time, the member for Mississauga—Erindale called those comments absurd.

To this day, the government has not engaged the Syrian community, which is still waiting to meet with the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism. To this day, the government has not matched dollar for dollar what the NGOs and the Syrian community have raised. They have raised millions of dollars. To this day, the absurd thing is that the government has had its head stuck in the sand and does not want to listen. I was wondering if my colleague could shed some light on how her party sees the situation of the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism is not meeting with the community and is not matching dollar for dollar.

I will quote a letter I received from abroad. It is from the manager at the embassy in Amman, Jordan. When I asked him if we were running a special program for Syrian refugees, he said, "At this time, there are no special programs for Syrian refugees". Yet the parliamentary secretary travelled with the minister to Turkey and said we have a special program. They—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. If the hon. member and the parliamentary secretary would like to discuss this matter, they are free to do so outside the chamber.

The hon. member for La Pointe-de-l'Île.

• (2105)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet: Mr. Speaker, it is important to mention that the House voted in favour of a motion calling for the government to increase humanitarian aid to refugees. However, to date, the government has still not provided any help to Turkey. Representatives from Turkey have even asked us for help. We have not helped Turkey.

It is also important to say that the House voted unanimously in favour of a motion that called on the government to help refugee families to reunite. The immigration minister voted in favour of that motion. I would like to say that the minister of immigration voted in favour of a reunification program. Where is that program?

It has been some time since we voted unanimously for this motion, and the program has still not been implemented.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. If the parliamentary secretary and the member for Scarborough—Agin-court want to continue this conversation, I suggest they do it outside the chamber. If they fail to do so, they will be asked to leave or they will not be recognized for the balance of the debate this evening.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Newton—North Delta.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague for the compassionate speech she made pleading with the government to intervene on humanitarian and compassionate grounds while a long-term peace settlement is sought.

The question I have for her is about family reunification. There is a tremendous diaspora in Canada from Syria. Family members are coming to constituency offices to plead for the speeding up of family reunification. How could the government facilitate family reunification for the Syrian diaspora?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet: Mr. Speaker, it is clear. We did it for the crisis in Haiti, and as my colleague from Québec mentioned, we did it during the conflict in Lebanon. We have taken such measures during many conflicts, including the Iraq war, which was not that long ago. In some situations, Canada has said that it can play a role and help refugees who have families here to come to Canada. Why are we not doing the same in the case of the Syrian crisis?

The immigration minister voted in favour of a motion that called on the government to create a family reunification program, but he never created one. He might as well not have voted, because if he is going to vote in favour of a motion in the House and then not follow up on it, his word no longer means anything.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate my colleague, the hon. member for La Pointe-de-l'Île. She is very eloquent, and I am always impressed by her work.

What does she think needs to happen in order for all the countries in the world to find a political solution? Which country is most

S. O. 52

important? I think Russia and perhaps China are the most important. What does my colleague think?

Ms. Ève Pécelet: Mr. Speaker, considering the nature of this crisis, the Syrian crisis, I think the support of the entire international community is important.

We all agree that this conflict is affecting more than just one country. It is starting to affect neighbouring countries. I think it is crucial that the Security Council and the United Nations combine their efforts.

Whether it is Russia, China or another country, Canada has a role to play. Canada has always been a neutral country that forged ahead. I think this is vital to diplomatic relations. Regardless of the country we choose to put pressure on, we need to come up with a solution for long-term peace, in co-operation with the UN.

• (2110)

[*English*]

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Mississauga—Streetsville.

Canada strongly condemns the ongoing violence against civilians in Syria. We call for full, safe and unhindered access by humanitarian actors to all affected populations in need.

Canada remains committed to saving lives and addressing the most critical needs of those affected by the Syrian crisis. Let me take just a moment to bring the House up to date on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

Protests against the regime of Bashar al-Assad started in mid-March 2011 in the southern city of Daraa. Fighting between government forces and armed opposition groups escalated and spread to most parts of the country, plunging Syria into further desperation.

Fierce fighting across large parts of the country has led to the massive displacement of civilians, increasing refugee outflows and decreasing access to basic services.

Violence has reached new heights over the last few months, including widespread shelling, bombardment of cities, mass killings and deliberate firing on civilian targets. According to reports, the conflict is primarily occurring in densely populated areas. The Syrian regime makes no distinction between combatants and civilians in conducting its military campaign against opposition forces, routinely violating international humanitarian law.

There is increasing use of heavy weapons in populated areas by both sides, leading to extensive destruction of infrastructure and massive loss of life. The International Committee of the Red Cross has described the current situation in Syria as nothing short of catastrophic. Countless homes, clinics, hospitals and other essential infrastructure, such as water and sanitation systems, have been destroyed or severely damaged.

S. O. 52

Civilians continue to be in the line of fire from this violent civil war. At this point, more people have been killed in the conflict since the start of this year than in the entire first year of the conflict. According to UNHCR, it is estimated that at least 80,000 people have died in the fighting, with many thousands of people wounded. In fact, while initially the number of monthly casualties was 1,000 per month in mid-2011, by July 2012, that number had risen to 5,000 per month.

As of today, nearly one and a half million Syrians have taken refuge in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. The conflict and the humanitarian situation are deteriorating rapidly as violence intensifies and fighting continues throughout the country.

Violence has spread to Damascus and other new, densely populated urban areas. This has led to increasing levels of destruction, casualties and displacement. The number of people affected by the crisis who are in need of humanitarian assistance is estimated to be more than 6.8 million. Within Syria itself, an estimated 4.25 million people have been displaced.

The strain on communities hosting refugees is compounding the other challenges they have. Tension between refugees and host communities is on the rise, mainly because of competition over jobs, housing and services. In both Lebanon and Jordan, energy, water, health and education services are strained to the limit from hosting the Syrian refugees. Both Lebanese and Jordanians are already facing high unemployment, high prices and poverty, so we can imagine how potentially volatile the situation is becoming.

Canada stepped up to the plate to help. On January 30, at the high-level pledging conference in Kuwait, the Minister of International Cooperation announced additional humanitarian support from Canada to help those affected by the conflict. He also made it clear that Canada continues to support the efforts of the international community to bring about an end to the violence. However, he stated that humanitarian assistance is not enough. A political solution to end the ongoing conflict must be found. Canada has repeatedly called on all parties to end the violence.

• (2115)

Canada's support to the World Food Programme is helping to provide food assistance for up to 2.5 million people. We are working with UNICEF to provide approximately 1.2 million children and their families with health services, immunization, nutrition support, water and sanitation, and education.

Humanitarian workers are making heroic efforts to meet the urgent needs of those affected by the violence. We commend their courageous efforts. They are placing their own lives at risk in order to provide life-saving assistance to those affected by the violence. However, these efforts continue to be obstructed. Even humanitarian actors are not immune to the violence and a number have laid down their lives in their efforts to save others.

Delivery of assistance continues to be precarious and constrained by security issues. As a result, several areas have been deprived of humanitarian assistance either because of the violence or because they have been denied access by both government and opposition groups.

Fighting in areas of humanitarian operations and places where relief supplies are stored remains a challenge. That is why Canada is providing operational support to the UN, to ensure adequate security measures are in place to provide humanitarian assistance and improve safety for humanitarian staff. We are receiving reports, however, that despite these conditions, humanitarian assistance continues in both government and opposition-held areas.

The heads of five UN agencies, UNICEF, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Food Programme, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the World Health Organization have appealed to the international community to use its collective influence to bring about a political solution to this crisis. They say that the region cannot sustain any more impact from this crisis.

Canada has been a compassionate and generous neighbour to those in need. However, we have repeatedly called on all parties to end the violence. We all know that humanitarian assistance is not enough. A political solution to the ongoing conflict must be found. Canada continues to support the efforts of the international community to bring about an end to the turmoil. The violence in Syria must end.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have just completed a full study on public-private partnerships dealing with aid. Many times and in many disasters over the last few years, the Liberal government and the Conservative government have matched dollars, for the tsunami, in Pakistan and other areas. My question is, with the member's position and her beliefs that we should be using more private funds to help and aid, why is her government not pushing for a matching of dollars to help people in Syria?

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Speaker, I believe the member was at the foreign affairs committee meeting when we had representatives from the Syrian community who came to see us. Indeed, they are doing great work in helping to raise funds for their community, but to date, the total had only been about \$30,000. Canada has been a very generous contributor to this situation. To date, we have pledged \$48.5 million to assist the people with humanitarian assistance. We are working with our international partners to make sure that the money gets quickly to the people who need it. We are one of the largest contributors to the World Food Programme, ensuring that the food is there for the people in those refugee camps and we continue to monitor the situation. We continue with our generosity. We want to see those people helped.

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation for her speech. I would like to begin by making a clarification. Some members seem to be confused when I spoke earlier. I did not say there was a program for refugees from Syria. I said that Canada supports and respects the international consensus, which I assume they all know about, which is reflected by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' recommendation that resettlement of Syrian refugees not take place at this time because they deem it to be too early in the crisis for other durable solutions to be ruled out and they cannot begin to address the scale of the situation.

S. O. 52

It is a commonly understood and internationally agreed recommendation that when a country is in a crisis, we do not automatically resettle the refugees. We want them to go to their homes once the crisis has ended. We are hoping that this crisis will end and those people will be able to return to their home. We do not want Syria to be depopulated by any minority groups.

The Liberal Party has suggested that Canada should engage in a more comprehensive way with the Syrian rebel forces. Can the parliamentary secretary point out to us some of the difficulties in determining whom among the Syrian rebel forces Canada should be supporting?

• (2120)

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Speaker, indeed, we have been very cautious about recognizing the opposition parties because they seem to be made up of very disparate groups of people. Therefore, although we encourage the people of Syria to continue to seek means to come to democracy, we want to be very cautious about how we support those opposition parties.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I want to go back to the debates that we had when Canada was involved in the Libyan conflict. It seems that, had we been able to avoid continuing bombardment and move to a peace process, we might have been able to secure those warehouses full of weapons. It seems very likely that the weapons that were taken from Khadafi's old storehouses found their way to increase terrorist activities in Mali and also fuel some of the al Qaeda forces that are now within Syria.

I wonder if she has had any information on that or any further factual support for the risks that we undertook in Libya that actually fueled terrorism elsewhere?

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Speaker, we are concerned about what is going on in Syria and the disparate groups of people who seem to be active there. We are concerned about weapons coming in from places like Iran. We are concerned about the positions of both China and Russia. As we said earlier, it is very difficult to get the information from inside Syria because it is often difficult to get into parts of the country that are held by government or by the opposition parties and to get the truth. All members of the international community are finding it very difficult to get that information.

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think it is great that all members of Parliament from all parties in this House have an opportunity to participate in this important debate tonight. That is a great thing about Canada's Parliament; we want to hear from all people.

I am here to talk about the situation in Syria. From the outset, Canada has actively supported multilateral efforts to address the conflict in Syria, including supporting ongoing political and security initiatives, while playing a leading role in meeting humanitarian needs. The Government of Canada will continue to closely collaborate with multilateral partners in an effort to find a solution to end the violence in Syria in order to allow for a transition to a stable, democratic and pluralistic Syria.

The violence in Syria continues to take a terrible toll on the civilian population. All Canadians are horrified by the ongoing violence in Syria, including the indiscriminate attacks on the civilian population. Despite the international outcry and numerous con-

demnations by the international community to end the violence, the conflict in Syria is worsening.

Since the violence began, more than 80,000 Syrians, most of them civilians, have lost their lives. Over 4.25 million Syrians have been displaced from their homes and communities. More than 6.8 million are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. The influx of refugees fleeing Syria underscores the appalling impact of this conflict.

Canada has soundly condemned the Assad regime's vicious and indiscriminate attacks on its civilians. We continue to call upon the Government of Syria to immediately cease the use of heavy weapons in population centres.

Conscious of the danger, hundreds of thousands of Syrians have chosen to flee their country and seek refuge outside its borders. Over 1.4 million individuals have fled to neighbouring countries. Turkey is hosting over 324,000 refugees. Lebanon is hosting over 455,000 and Jordan is hosting over 448,000. Iraq is hosting over 142,000, while Egypt is hosting more than 62,000. We want to commend the governments of these countries for their great generosity in welcoming those who are seeking safety. We recognize the burden that this places on them.

Canada stands with the Syrian people in their time of need. Canada, through CIDA, has provided humanitarian assistance to allow humanitarian organizations to provide urgent life-saving relief inside Syria and to those who have sought relief in neighbouring countries. This support is allowing humanitarian organizations to provide emergency food assistance, shelter, safe water, sanitation facilities, essential household items, emergency health care and often much-needed assistance to Syrians who are affected by this crisis.

We will continue to work closely with our like-minded partners to address those humanitarian needs, both inside Syria and in those neighbouring countries.

For many of those remaining in Syria, unfortunately, the outlook is grim. Humanitarian organizations, most notably the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as United Nations agencies, are making every effort to meet the urgent life-saving needs of those affected by the violence.

• (2125)

However, these efforts continue to be obstructed. UN humanitarian relief efforts continue to be hampered by extreme insecurity and restrictions imposed by the Assad regime. Sadly, even humanitarian actors are not immune from the violence and have paid with their lives in their efforts to provide relief to others.

Canada continues to call for a full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access to those who are in need. Those in positions of power in Syria must move quickly to facilitate those efforts. The Government of Canada, in co-operation with other international partners, will continue to press at every opportunity on this point.

S. O. 52

Canada is deeply concerned by threats to the safety and security faced by humanitarian workers in Syria. Already the Secretary General of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and five Red Crescent volunteers have lost their lives in the line of duty. We pay tribute to their immense courage.

Medical personnel, medical facilities and ambulances must not be targeted, and health care personnel must be able to provide aid in safety without hindrance. The Red Cross and Red Crescent emblems, for example, must be respected by all sides.

Canada continues to support the efforts of the international community to bring about an end to the violence. Canada has financially supported the mission of the UN Joint Special Representative. We have repeatedly called on all parties to cooperate with and support the efforts of the Joint Special Representative, Lakhdar Brahimi, to end the bloodshed and facilitate an inclusive Syrian-led political transition.

We urge the UN Security Council to adopt binding international sanctions against the Assad regime in order to increase pressure on Assad to immediately stop the violence and end what is now becoming a humanitarian catastrophe. We continue to call on those countries with influence in Damascus to press the Assad regime to end the violence and work toward a peaceful political transition.

Canada has enacted 11 rounds of strict economic sanctions against the Assad regime and has expelled all remaining Syrian diplomats. We call on countries around the world to adopt equally strong measures against the Syrian regime to ensure it fulfills its commitments and immediately stops the senseless slaughter of its own people.

Canada has participated in all of the Friends of Syria working groups and co-chaired a meeting of the International Working Group on Sanctions, known as the Friends of the Syrian People. We will continue to exert pressure on the Syrian regime in order to further isolate Assad.

The Government of Canada will continue to support multilateral efforts to end the needless suffering of Syrians affected by this crisis. We will work to ensure life-saving assistance reaches those who need it.

Finally, the violence in Syria must end. A political solution to the crisis must be found. The international community must redouble its efforts to pressure the Syrian regime to stop the violence against its own citizens. Assad must step down to allow a democratic and pluralistic Syria to emerge.

May God bless all the people of Syria in this time of need.

• (2130)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his speech. I have a simple question for him.

Since his government voted in favour of a motion calling on the House and the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism to introduce a mechanism to facilitate family reunification, why has nothing been done to date?

If my colleague recognizes that there is a crisis in Syria and that the situation is urgent, why has his government still not done anything to help Syrian refugees?

[*English*]

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Speaker, there is no country in the world that is more open than Canada to refugees and to helping those around the world and resettling them not just in Canada but around the world. We will take no lessons from any other regime or any other individual in the House in that regard. Canada's reputation is stellar.

Our job is to work with the United Nations human rights commissioner and the refugee resettlement program to make sure we are working with them to ensure that Canada's role is in partnership with the international community. That is exactly what the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration has said we are doing, and that is exactly what Canada will continue to do. Our job is to partner with the international community to get the best results for those Syrians and those Syrian refugees who are outside of their country right now and to make sure they can return home to the country they love.

• (2135)

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I detect a certain tension in the government's position. On the one hand, the government's position would appear to be that Assad must go, but on the other hand, we are not sure what is going to replace him so we are not sure how or when he should go. I wonder if the member could perhaps clarify the government's position with respect to the position of President Assad.

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Toronto Centre for starting this conversation tonight. It was his motion that brought us here. As members of Parliament, we all play an important role in these conversations and make sure we are speaking out on issues both domestically and internationally. I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate in this debate.

The situation in Syria is complicated. It is not just about a regime change of the current leadership, but it is also about making sure that regime change when it does happen will benefit the people of Syria, that it is in their best interests, that it is not just some rogue group that takes over.

Our job as the Government of Canada in working with our international partners is to make sure we facilitate an appropriate regime change at the appropriate time that ensures Syrians have their country back in a democratic, fair and pluralistic society that respects basic human rights for all the people who want to live in Syria. That is what all of us in the House want. That is what this government will be promoting.

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, everyone in the House as well as the hon. member for Mississauga—Streetsville has heard about the terrible allegations of the potential use of chemical weapons, sarin gas, in Syria. The rebels say that the Assad regime used them, while the Assad regime says the rebel forces used them. There is credible evidence coming from other countries that such weapons have been used in Syria.

Could my colleague tell us what the Government of Canada's response has been and how the Government of Canada is trying to help in that regard?

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Speaker, if it is true that chemical weapons have been used by either side in any way, shape or form, it would completely change the dynamics. It would be completely unacceptable. There is not a human being alive who would say that action is acceptable. To do that against any other human being is unacceptable.

I am sure our government will continue to play a strong role in this and make sure that, if that is indeed the case, swifter, stronger and better action is taken against the perpetrators.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Lavergère (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am going to share the time I have with my colleague, the hon. member for Saint-Lambert.

We know the situation in Syria is terrible. Let us first talk about the 70,000 people who have been killed there. I would like to take this opportunity to again extend my condolences to the families and loved ones of those 70,000 people. Beyond those who have died, however, there are also the living who are experiencing terrible suffering right now.

For the past few months especially, we have seen a massive influx of refugees into the neighbouring countries, including Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt. In January 2013, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees counted 500,000 refugees. Half a million refugees is a huge number. Four short months later, there are 1.3 million refugees in the neighbouring countries. Some people believe that the number could be even higher because the quicker and larger the influx, the longer it takes to register people. Half of those 1.3 million refugees are children. Over half a million children are living in camps, often in appalling conditions.

All this puts absolutely enormous pressure on the neighbouring countries. Lebanon, for example, could have 1.2 million refugees by the end of the year. That is terrible. Lebanon, Turkey and the other countries are doing everything they can, but they cannot handle the situation alone. No one could. If we take the figures for Lebanon and compare them to the population, for example, it would be the same as Canada suddenly receiving 3 million refugees. A developed country like Canada would have a lot of difficulty taking in 3 million refugees at once. Therefore, we can imagine that countries in the region are facing almost insurmountable challenges, which they certainly cannot overcome without the help of the international community.

That is not all. There are refugees outside Syria, but there are also displaced persons inside the country. We are talking about 4 million displaced persons, approximately half of whom are children. In addition to those 4 million displaced persons within the country, there are 2.8 million people who urgently need humanitarian aid.

A few weeks ago, I was in New York, where I met with representatives of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. They described the situation to me: drug shortages, destroyed water systems, lack of sanitation, destroyed hospitals, schools that have all but disappeared, children in Aleppo who have not gone to school in a year or two. The country is essentially falling apart.

S. O. 52

The needs are immense. Without massive international humanitarian aid, the consequences could be catastrophic. This aid is needed immediately. Epidemics are starting to take hold here and there, and things are going to get worse this summer.

To work with refugees outside Syria, people displaced within Syria and people who need humanitarian aid, the UN has asked for \$1.6 billion, but it has received commitments for just over half that amount.

● (2140)

[*English*]

I would like to lend my voice to Stephen Cornish, the executive director of Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders, who wrote an excellent article recently. He said:

We are failing the Syrian people. Right now, women, men and children are suffering and dying needlessly. We can and must do more to help them.

I recently returned from a two-week mission to Syria, Lebanon and Turkey. There I met with Syrians struggling to survive a brutal civil war that has so far killed more than 70,000 people and forced more than one and a half million to flee to neighbouring countries.

I also met with aid workers providing lifesaving assistance—from my own organization, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), and from the few others present.

One thing became absolutely clear to me on this trip. We, the international community, are not living up to our responsibility to meet the escalating humanitarian needs of the people caught up in this intractable war.

Truly, we are failing the Syrian people. The medical needs are overwhelming—from shrapnel injuries that go untreated for lack of accessible care, to pregnant women who must risk their lives to deliver their babies, to sufferers of chronic illnesses like diabetes and cancer who can't obtain treatment, to the miserable and unsanitary conditions of the camps for displaced people.

He went on to say:

The conflict in Syria shows no sign of abating, and the needs of the Syrian people are increasing daily. There is no excuse for our continued humanitarian failure. We must act now.

● (2145)

[*Translation*]

I agree with those comments and with what Mr. Cornish said about how this is not a question of money. We have to admit it. We also have to convince Damascus and the opposition groups to give humanitarian workers access so that they can provide some much-needed aid.

We also have to help and push the neighbouring countries to make it easier for humanitarian workers to gain access and do their work. There are things we need to work on. We must encourage people on the ground to comply with international humanitarian law.

Despite these problems, money remains the key, because in order to have humanitarian workers, there needs to be money to send them there. Of course, Canada has made an effort in that regard, but it barely scratches the surface. The Minister of International Cooperation is sitting on hundreds of millions of dollars, even though we know from experience that hundreds of worthy projects could have been supported by CIDA.

Could the minister not have taken a small portion of those hundreds of millions of dollars to help cope with this tremendous humanitarian crisis?

S. O. 52

The money is there. There is no doubt about it. There is no excuse for inaction. The Syrians, their neighbours and the international community expect nothing less from us.

[*English*]

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has been a very generous donor. We are the fifth largest donor per capita. To date we have contributed \$48.5 million to help with the humanitarian situation in Syria. We continue to assess the situation and will do more as the needs grow. However, we do call on all funders to pay what they pledge. We would like to see all of those contributions that have been targeted for the Syrian conflict brought to the table so that humanitarian efforts can be made.

I would personally like to thank very much all the Canadians whose hard-earned tax dollars we are spending to help in the humanitarian assistance. I wonder if my colleague would not like to do the same.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank all Canadians who, in one way or another, through their taxes or donations, are doing something about this very serious situation.

The parliamentary secretary said that Canada will reassess its contribution as needs grow.

Since January, the number of refugees has tripled and, as far as I know, Canada has not reassessed its contribution. It seems to me that her remarks are not in tune with reality.

I am not trying to downplay the fact that \$48.5 million has been contributed. That is a very good thing. However, the British government, which is in a much more difficult financial position, gave almost five times more.

• (2150)

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. Her statistics on the growing number of refugees are quite disturbing.

Three neighbouring countries are dealing with the situation: Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. Canada must do everything it can to help these countries. There would be nothing worse than having instability spread beyond Syria's borders.

The most fragile of these countries is definitely Lebanon. The government has resigned, the prime minister has not yet been replaced and we do not know when that will happen. Hezbollah is very difficult to control for obvious reasons. The president is a serious individual.

I would have liked to ask the government some questions, but I will ask my colleague because she is very familiar with the file.

What contacts does Canada have in Lebanon? Who is Canada talking to? How are we ensuring that we are helping this country deal with the storm that is blowing in from Syria?

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his excellent question and for the excellent points he raised, especially with respect to destabilization.

Soon, 10% of all people in Lebanon will be Syrian refugees. Lebanon is a fragile country and many of these refugees live in local communities or with extended family.

The economic and social burden this places on Lebanon only adds to the destabilization. That is why, when we talk about humanitarian assistance, we sometimes talk about fixing urgent problems. However, sometimes we can almost talk about prevention, because when we help these people, we help Lebanon, and we can help avoid destabilizing the entire region, which no one wants.

Who are we talking to in Lebanon? Unfortunately, since I am not a government member, I cannot say. I know that on the government side they are always vocal and proclaiming this or that. However, they do not seem to sit down with our partners and roll up their sleeves to work together and find solutions.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, tonight we are all here to focus on the seriousness of the situation in Syria.

Human lives are at stake here. Women and children are suffering in Syria, and Syrian-Canadian families are suffering here in Canada as they wait to see their family members. For months, the NDP has been putting pressure on the government to fulfill Canada's humanitarian responsibilities in response to the conflict in this country. That means taking action. For months, we have been urging the government to take action to save lives, welcome refugees and reunite families.

To date, the Syrian civil war has caused the death of more than 70,000 people. In total, no fewer than 4 million people have been displaced within or outside the country, which is 20% of the population. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said this week that there are more than 1.3 million Syrian refugees in the surrounding countries. For a country like Jordan, with 6.5 million people, taking in 450,000 refugees is a massive challenge. Organizations and authorities on site are unable to keep up with demand for infrastructure, medical care and basic necessities.

A month ago, an HCR spokesperson, Adrian Edwards, warned that we are at a breaking point. With the alleged use of chemical weapons, the increased number of refugees and emerging epidemics, it seems that we are about to go beyond the breaking point if we have not already.

The Syrian conflict has been going on for two years now. Two years of combat, two years of internal fighting, two years of repression. The Canadian government has to face the facts: a political solution is not going to appear overnight and we must do whatever we can until then, whether that means supporting our allies, Syria's neighbouring countries, organizations on the ground or refugees fleeing the country in terror and insecurity.

The Canadian government cannot just keep giving speeches that are devoid of meaningful proposals. There needs to be a real plan. Otherwise, it is leaving the door open to massacres and merciless combats where no one wins and the people of Syria risk losing everything. Conversely, over the past few months, the NDP has taken action and come up with solutions to improve the lives of these refugees. We began by moving a motion in order to condemn the acts committed in Syria and get the Canadian government to do something to limit the impact of these abuses.

Then, on a number of occasions, my colleague from Ottawa Centre and I met with representatives from the Syrian community in Canada, something the Minister of Immigration has refused to do. They told us how upset they are about the current situation. They talked to us about the government's inaction both politically and in terms of humanitarian aid. They illustrated how important it is to take action in order to save lives. We need to take action right now, not six months or a year from now. Two ways we can act are by implementing procedures to expedite family reunification and by welcoming refugees.

This emergency debate is the time to think about the importance of adopting a real plan to limit the adverse effects on individuals, a people and an entire region. A more significant intervention by the international community seems unlikely at this time, given the opposition from permanent members of the Security Council that have veto power. Nonetheless, we can do something. We must do something.

The NDP believes that Canada must introduce meaningful measures to limit the effects of the Syrian crisis and live up to Canada's humanitarian responsibilities. We believe it is possible to take action and that we must do everything in our power to support the Syrian people, who are the primary victims of this bloody conflict. Canada must be there to support international organizations on the ground by providing equipment and supplies to improve the lives of refugees who have been in camps for months on end.

• (2155)

That shortcoming is obvious and inevitably has consequences on the health of refugees, and the safety and capacity of the camps.

In March, Doctors Without Borders drew attention to the fact that Syria's health care system was breaking down, hospital infrastructure was crumbling because of bombing, and thousands of women and children were at risk. It also highlighted the dangers of disease outbreaks, the increased numbers of infections and diseases as well as a significant increase in the number of miscarriages and premature births.

In addition, hundreds of thousands of people are crowding into small areas where resources are inadequate. Yes, the Minister of Foreign Affairs announced \$48 million, but real action is still lacking.

The Canadian government must also focus on decreasing processing times for family sponsorship applications so that we can reunite Syrian families that are anxious about their loved ones. Their anxiety is made worse because sponsorship applications are being transferred and there are processing delays of 16 months in Ankara. That also increases the danger for Syrian applicants who

S. O. 52

have been waiting for months. In exceptional situations, exceptional measures need to be considered and taken. That is what must happen here, in the case of Syria's civil war.

Lastly, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism needs to introduce procedures to make it easier to welcome Syrian refugees. Millions of people have been displaced, and Canada has not stepped in to support them. The Canadian government has a moral duty to save lives and enable these people to leave the insecurity in which they live. We cannot shrink from Canada's responsibility to meet our humanitarian obligations.

To conclude, the situation is, of course, serious and the consequences are even more so. What is being done is not enough given the human tragedy taking place in Syria. There is also a complex political situation that will not make a political solution easy, as the minister suggested. Therefore, this political solution will be a long time coming. In the meantime, we must continue to act as effectively as possible and provide even more tools.

We need to keep on hoping to change things, keep on hoping that the situation of the refugees will be addressed and that we can improve their lives, keep on hoping that Canada will live up to its humanitarian responsibilities, keep on hoping that members of Parliament care about the fate of a population that has great need of our unwavering support.

• (2200)

[*English*]

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened quite attentively to the hon. member's speech. She repeatedly spoke about the need for additional, immediate humanitarian action at this time. That appears to be in contrast to António Guterres, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, who said:

We must recognize that there is no humanitarian solution to the Syrian crisis. Only through a political solution leading to peace can the humanitarian emergency be brought to a conclusion.

I wonder how the hon. member would respond to António Guterres.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

A political solution must be applied. I would like to point out to my colleague that we are looking at an emergency. Women and children are facing indescribable violence, and refugees are dealing with living conditions in the camps that are also indescribable.

I would like to refer to a media kit from March 2013, issued by Doctors without Borders, that mentions the emergency in Syria: "Syria Two Years On: The Failure of International Aid".

I do think a political solution is needed, but humanitarian action is as well, and it must be stepped up.

[*English*]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I hope the member will forgive me for asking my question in English, because I want to quote the Minister of Foreign Affairs. It is in contrast to the quote by my colleague from the Conservative Party, who just spoke.

S. O. 52

I was sitting in the House tonight when the Minister of Foreign Affairs said, “Whatever we are doing, it is not enough”. He then went on to say that we will do more.

I would ask my colleague from Saint-Lambert if she agrees with the Minister of Foreign Affairs when he used those words.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. I thank my colleague for his question.

I think that the government is taking steps and boasting about everything it is doing to address the situation. That being said, we need to do even more. That is key. I think that above and beyond the figures that have been mentioned and the political measures that we hope to implement, there is really is, as I mentioned earlier, an urgent need for humanitarian aid that will require much more than what is currently being done.

Yes, it will involve saving lives and protecting women and children from the violence they are experiencing. We must also think about family reunification. We have been calling on the government to take such measures for weeks now. We specifically asked the immigration minister to talk to the Minister of Foreign Affairs about helping families to be reunited as quickly as possible. There are Syrian Canadians who just want one thing: to be able to be reunited with their families and welcome them to Canada.

They are prepared to use all their money and savings to welcome them as warmly as possible. What are we waiting for? This is urgent and we must take action.

• (2205)

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her speech, which was very interesting, as always.

I believe that, in the past, Canada has had processes to fast-track family reunification in times of major humanitarian crises. I was wondering if she could comment on that. Does she understand why the government does not want to do the same thing in this case?

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question.

Indeed, there have been precedents in the past. As just one example, consider the war in Lebanon, during which we welcomed huge numbers of refugees and other people in the context of family reunification.

So, the precedent has been set. It exists and we can use it again today to reunite Syrian families with other family members who have already settled here.

We do not really understand. We have not heard any significant or relevant explanations to help us understand why this government is dragging its feet on family reunification.

[*English*]

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to respond first to a couple of issues that were just raised. In response to the question about Canada immediately bringing refugees, we are doing exactly what the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has asked us to do. There is actually an international

consensus that during a crisis, people should not be immediately evacuated to other nations on a permanent basis. It is the hope—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: We should welcome them here.

[*English*]

Mr. James Lunney: No, we do not. I am sure the member will check and find that it is the international convention. It is for the simple reason that we all hope they will be able to go back to a normalized nation and be given the choice of where they would like to live. We presume that the majority of them would like to go back to their homes in their own country in a stable, secure Syria.

Second, the member mentioned the crisis in Lebanon. Many of the people Canada flew out of Lebanon were actually Canadian citizens with dual citizenship.

Another point I would like to respond to was, in fact, the point raised about the minister's comment that there is a need for more and that we will do more. What the minister actually said, because I was listening to that debate, was that as time goes on, we will do more as the opportunity becomes available, in concert with our international partners. Canada has done more than almost any other nation, at this juncture, in providing aid to refugees, and we will continue to do so, as the minister said.

I will be sharing my time with the member for Richmond Hill.

Mr. Speaker, nearly every passing day, more shocking reports emerge of the atrocities committed against the Syrian people by the ruthless regime of Bashar al-Assad. The horrific toll of the conflict on the Syrian population is staggering. To date it is estimated by the UN that 80,000 people have been killed. More than 4.25 million have been internally displaced by the violence. In terms of refugees, we estimate that 1.4 million people, possibly as many as 1.5 million, are currently refugees from the conflict in Syria. They are in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. Some are in Egypt, and some are in Iraq. According to the UN High Commission, they are registering as many as 7,000 refugees a day. We heard the minister say earlier that in Jordan, as many as 2,000 are arriving each day. This is a humanitarian crisis on a huge scale.

Reports on the ground detail a litany of horrific human rights abuses committed by the Syrian regime. Tragically, with the conflict now in its third year, the human rights and humanitarian situation in the country continues to deteriorate. The UN commission of inquiry on Syria has now issued several reports documenting widespread, systemic and gross human rights violations by Syrian security forces, including arbitrary arrest, detention, sexual violence, pillaging and the destruction of cultural and other protected properties.

Our government, and I am sure all Canadians, continue to be deeply concerned about ongoing reports of sectarian violence, which has been exacerbated by the crisis in Syria. Upon their liberation from Assad's iron fist, the Syrian people must not find themselves threatened by those who seek to impose a new type of tyranny or those who threaten the security and stability of Syria's neighbours.

Our government has for some time been speaking up for religious minorities in Syria. Most recently, on May 4, following a deeply troubling incident of violence in the coastal city of Baniyas, Canada's new ambassador for religious freedom, Andrew Bennett, condemned the violence and urged respect for religious minorities. The Syrian people have a strong cultural pluralism, acceptance and coexistence that is at odds with recent attacks singling out individual groups.

There was another troubling incident recently. Metropolitan Paul Yazigi, of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese, and Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, of the Syriac Archdiocese, both of Aleppo, were abducted while returning to Syria from Turkey, where they had been doing humanitarian work. Once again, on April 25, our government spoke out against these events and called for the immediate release of their eminences.

Sadly, even women and children are not safe from the violence. There are deeply troubling reports from Syria consistently suggesting that sexual violence has become prevalent, both on an opportunistic basis and as a deliberate method of warfare. There have also been disturbing reports of displaced women being abducted. Trafficking of women, as well as girls, is well documented.

• (2210)

The Assad regime has indiscriminately killed and injured great numbers of civilians through the use of heavy weapons in populated areas. It has launched scud missiles at the northern rebel-held cities in Syria, with no apparent effort to distinguish between civilian and legitimate military targets. There is also credible reporting that suggests the Assad regime has used cluster munitions as a weapon of war against its own citizens, including dropping bombs indiscriminately from attack helicopters on densely populated urban areas. More recently we have heard reports on the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria. The UN has established a fact-finding mission to establish whether such weapons have been used and by whom.

Canada has contributed some \$2 million to these efforts. Unfortunately, I suppose we could say unsurprisingly, the Syrian regime and authorities have yet to grant the mission permission to visit and begin its investigation.

I think we heard the minister say earlier that if chemical weapons have been used, it would be important to determine who they were used by. If they were used, it would be important to determine when they were used and, as we said, by whom, because that would be essential in holding the perpetrators to account. There are conflicting reports, as to whether it is the regime or the rebels who have used chemical weapons. In either case, the use of chemical weapons is a huge escalation, and all of our international partners are duly alarmed by this escalation and determined to hold the perpetrators to account. Ultimately, Assad and his supporters, if they are culpable, will be held accountable.

Canada's objectives in Syria support a transition to a stable, democratic, pluralistic post-Assad time, while addressing the urgent humanitarian needs of those affected by the crisis. Through this difficult and violent period, one that has claimed the lives of far too many innocent civilians, we remain committed to a democratic transition in Syria.

S. O. 52

Canada will continue to express the need for respect and promotion of human rights, particularly for religious minorities. It is vitally important that all Syrians can contribute to development without fear of violence. It is our hope, in fact it is our belief, that the regime's strategy of ruthless repression will not succeed in crushing the spirit of the Syrian people.

We are all hopeful that out of this terrible carnage and devastation will emerge a better future for the suffering people of Syria. I look forward to questions from my colleagues.

• (2215)

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in terms of the early exchange that the member for Nanaimo—Alberni had with the member for Saint-Lambert, I wonder if the member would not agree with me that there is a difference between refugee claims, treating refugees and dealing with the refugee issue, and accelerating Canada's dealing with the immigration claims of those people who are seeking reconciliation with their families.

We have been arguing for a clear policy in the office in Beirut as well as in Amman that would allow those offices to deal on an accelerated basis with people who wish to be reconciled with their families in Canada and to make sure those claims are dealt with on an expedited basis because they are living in a refugee camp.

I hope the member would understand the difference between what we are asking for and what he is saying in terms of the broad issue of resettling all the refugees. I think everyone agrees that we do not resettle all the refugees until we can figure out whether there is a political solution available in Syria. However, that is different from the people who have a connection with Canada and with Canadians and whose claims are not being treated right now on an expedited basis.

Mr. James Lunney: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Toronto Centre for bringing this subject to the floor of the House of Commons today so we could all take part in a debate.

The member knows full well, and even the way he framed his question would indicate he is well aware that there are international norms and conventions on managing a refugee crisis situation. In fact, whether there are family members in Canada or not, if they were applying for Canadian citizenship and in the queue already, accelerated claims for a small number of those cases might be reasonable.

There are very sound reasons that the UN High Commission and other responsible partners have come to the conclusion that in a humanitarian crisis it is not the first objective to take people out of the conflict zone and depopulate Syria to other countries. It creates a whole different dynamic that is actually not helpful to the long-term solution in the area and the betterment of refugee situations around the world.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague across the aisle for the speech he made. All of us share the concern about what is happening in Syria.

S. O. 52

We have quite a large diaspora from Syria, and many of them have come to my constituency office. I have heard from other MPs, as well, that those coming in have family members and do qualify under our immigration system for family reunification. What could the member's government be doing at this time to speed up family reunification to help both the Canadian families here and those who are suffering over there?

Mr. James Lunney: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Newton—North Delta, who is also from the west coast, for her question.

For the Canadians who have family members caught in that conflict, it is quite understandable that they would be very anxious for the well-being of their relatives. By living in a refugee camp, at least they are out of the conflict zone, but no matter how well they may be provided for, it is not a normal situation for families. We have heard examples of children. The minister gave an example of a seven-year-old child, who when asked said, "I don't like it here. I want to go home". That is a very normal thing. However, in spite of that there are international norms that should be respected in the situation.

I think the government is probably looking at what might be done to accelerate those who have family situations there, and there may be cases for some assistance. However, for the majority, we would hope for a quick resolution to the crisis so we can move toward normalization. Populations can be dealt with as the crisis abates and a more normal situation emerges.

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this very important issue and to respond to some of the irresponsible and misleading claims being made by the opposition.

I understand the anxiety that Syrian-Canadians must be feeling right now about their loved ones. That is why we have been meeting with the Syrian-Canadian community regularly. The Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism has met and spoken with Syrian-Canadians on many occasions, and across the country, including Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa, Calgary and Vancouver. I know the Minister of Foreign Affairs has also met with the community on several occasions to discuss the situation in Syria.

We will continue to meet with the Syrian-Canadian community, to hear their concerns and keep them informed about what our government is doing. Both ministers have also visited refugee camps, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism in Turkey, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Jordan, to get a better understanding of the situation first-hand.

I must say that I find it somewhat hypocritical that the NDP and the Liberals are constantly claiming that the government needs to work more closely with international organizations like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, yet they stand in this House and ask our government to completely ignore, if not deny, the direction provided by that very same organization with respect to this issue.

The UNHCR is not currently referring Syrian refugees for resettlement. Due to the enormity of the situation and the number of people flowing into refugee camps, it has asked countries to place their immediate focus on humanitarian assistance so that it can provide the food, water and medical care required. Our government

is respecting the international consensus and expert advice of the UNHCR, and is working co-operatively with our partners. I am disappointed that the opposition is acting in direct contrast to the direction of the UNHCR on this very important issue.

Canada has provided over \$80 million in humanitarian assistance to date. Just this past January, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism was in Turkey, where he met with representatives from the UNHCR and the Turkish Red Crescent, and visited displaced Syrians in makeshift camps. While there, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism announced \$1.5 million for the Red Cross to help provide food, water, shelter, hygiene kits, blankets, heaters and clothing for up to 170,000 displaced Syrians. Canada is playing its part to help deal with the humanitarian situation, and we have provided significant funds.

The opposition also likes to conveniently ignore the efforts we have made to help relieve some of the pressure on these refugee camps. The fact is that there were already thousands upon thousands of refugees in many of these refugee camps before the Syrian crisis.

We are delivering on our commitment to resettle 20,000 Iraqi refugees, which will help to relieve some of the pressure in these neighbouring countries. Canada has the most fair and generous refugee system in the world. We welcome one in ten of all resettled refugees, more than any other country. I would note that while the UNHCR is not referring any refugees for resettlement at this time, our government has been actively working on options that will allow us to act if the UN does at some point in the future recommend resettlement of these refugees.

When the international community is in a position to change its focus from providing immediate and life-saving humanitarian aid to beginning the job of resettling persons, Canada will be there to help. We continue to encourage Syrian-Canadians who are in contact with their family members in Syria to advise them to reach the UNHCR site and register as refugees in order to be processed.

In addition to the refugee situation, we have made real progress on immigration applications. The visa office in Damascus was understandably closed due to the continuing violence. As a result, processing capacity in the region was increased to compensate, with more staff and processing capacity in both Beirut and Amman.

● (2220)

Immigration officials have been working very hard to process family class and privately sponsored refugee applications from Syria as quickly as possible despite the difficult operational environment that is presented to them on the ground in the region. Instead of criticizing them, the opposition should be commending them for the hard work Canadian officials have been doing to process applications from Syria.

I am pleased to inform the House that almost all of the family class sponsorship for spouses and dependent children have been finalized. For family class cases with compelling circumstances, visa officers have been issuing temporary resident visas to allow applicants to come to Canada while their applications are being processed, and they are processing existing permanent resident applications as expeditiously as possible, while still ensuring that security and admissibility checks are performed. Our government has listened to the Syrian Canadian community and we are taking responsible actions to deal with this very important issue.

I would like to conclude my remarks by reading a quote from Antonio Guterres, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, who said in a statement last year:

We must recognize that there is no humanitarian solution to the Syrian crisis. Only through a political solution leading to peace can the humanitarian emergency be brought to a conclusion.

The enormity and scale of the situation means that the piecemeal approach proposed by the opposition is just that, piecemeal. Our government will continue to work collaboratively with the UNHCR and other nations to ensure that our response to the situation in Syria is effective and appropriate. We will continue to press for a political solution to end the violence and the humanitarian crisis. Instead of misleading and fearmongering, I urge the opposition to work with our government to work toward a resolution that is lasting.

Let me close by saying that our thoughts and prayers are with the Syrian people and their families.

● (2225)

[Translation]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague's speech focused mainly on visas. He also talked about spouses sponsoring one another.

Since our embassy in Syria is closed, no consular or embassy services are being offered in that country.

I would like the member to explain to the House where the nearest embassy or service point is. Where can Syrians go to obtain these services? How are people in refugee camps supposed to do this? There are 4.2 million displaced people in Syria.

In his speech, the member talked about visas. Where is the nearest place they can obtain such services?

[English]

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Mr. Speaker, the simple answer to her question is that the processing capacity was increased in the region to compensate for the fact that the office in Damascus was closed, with the offices in Beirut and Amman becoming full-service offices. I can appreciate the anxiety and concern Canadians have for their friends and families in Syria. Officials are working to process family class and privately sponsored refugee applications from Syria as quickly as possible given the difficult operational environment.

Having said that, I am happy to say that almost all spousal sponsorships that were pending have been finalized. For family class cases with compelling circumstances, visa officers are issuing temporary resident visas to allow applicants to come to Canada while their applications are being processed, and permanent resident

S. O. 52

applications are being processed as expeditiously as possible, while ensuring, of course, security and admissibility checks are performed.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just listened to my colleague across the way saying that the applications for permanent federal skilled workers to Canada are expedited. I am going to quote him, and I want him to agree or disagree with the manager of the visa post in Amman, Jordan, as well as the manager in Beirut, because they wrote back exactly the same. My question was: Are we expediting independent class applications from Syria? The answer is: "At this time there is no special program for Syrians to expedite their federal skilled workers application".

My colleague also said that the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration is meeting right across Canada with Syrian groups. My challenge to him is when, where and how did he meet? Will he be able to table those meetings and those days right now, because I have in my hand from the Syrian community a letter they wrote to the minister's office and they said to his staff:

Thank you for the phone conversation and we look forward to receiving a positive response to our request for a meeting with the Honourable Minister.

In anticipation of the meeting, please find attached our proposals for government action to help the victims of the disaster in Syria.

It was dated February 19, and they are still waiting.

If my colleague has that information, I challenge him to table it right here and right now. I also ask him to tell me—

● (2230)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Richmond Hill.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the heckling by the hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt when I was presenting my speech in the House, I respected the rules of the House and did not heckle when he was asking his very verbose question, with whose premise I completely disagree. I did not refer in my comments or in my speech—

An hon. member: A point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt, a real point of order.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Speaker, I sat quietly and I listened to my colleague, so my challenge to you as well as the committee is that I would like for you please to look at the blues and come back and rule if I was heckling the member, yes or no.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Mr. Speaker, I will just respond to the question because I am not going to engage in this kind of childish behaviour with the hon. member opposite.

S. O. 52

I did not refer to the skilled worker program. I was referring to those families who actually are in need. We have increased staffing capacity in both Beirut and Amman. We are processing applications as fast as we can to reunify those families. It is a very difficult situation. As members can well appreciate, there are tens of thousands of people who have lost their lives. It is a very sensitive situation. We are very aware of that. We are working very closely with our officials on the ground and under the leadership of our Minister of Foreign Affairs and our Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. This is a situation that is of priority for us.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I can attest that, personally working for Syrian members of my community, I have been so relieved to have two husbands come to their wives in Canada and to see an increase in staffing in Amman, Jordan. I am personally aware of that, but I definitely agree with the minister in his speech that we are not doing enough yet.

I am hearing reports from Syrians who are trying to get an appointment with the embassy in Lebanon, but the local staff, the guards around our embassy, treat them disrespectfully and do not let them get to the door. It is a conflict situation, and the other misconception is that the refugee camps are run by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. They are not; they are run by the host countries. Once people are there as refugees, they are still afraid. Some of them are so afraid that they are not prepared to go to the Red Crescent or the Red Cross to report in, so that they can be recorded.

It is a difficult situation. I am not saying it is easy, but we are not doing enough to reunite some of the people who still could be brought home to their families in Canada.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her question and her concern. It is always good to look internally and believe that we can be doing more. This is something on which we are very, very focused. It is a priority for us. We know we are dealing with real people here in very difficult situations. I can appreciate and attest to some of the comments that the hon. member made, but it is something that is, as I stated previously, of primary concern to our government and we are focusing on it on a full-time basis.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is actually quite heartbreaking to get up and take part in such a debate. As parliamentarians, I am sure that on all sides of the House, we would rather debate a thousand other things than the terrible situation in Syria.

Just to remind us all, 70,000 have died in Syria during this conflict. More than a million have been displaced. That is such a huge number.

I am one of those fortunate people who have never lived in a war zone. I was born post-World War II. I grew up in England and came to Canada in the 1970s. I have never lived in a situation where the country I was living in actually had battles and bombings going on all around me. I can really say that the closest I have come to being in something that looked like a war zone was when I was in Bangladesh recently. When I turned on the TV, I saw that in the area we had left just hours before cars were being turned over and set on fire, and bombs were going off. I can remember feeling the anxiety, thinking this had happened where I had just walked.

Right now, my heart goes out to the hundreds and thousands of the Syrian diaspora who live right here in Canada, a safe country. What they do is watch what is going on in Syria on television and through social media. I think about the pain and anguish they must live through every single day.

When we watch it on TV and when we hear about the escalation of violence and the use of chemical weapons and that there are events that could lead to a spread of this conflict to surrounding nations, we quake. I do. I get really worried about world security and about our children and grandchildren.

Then I ask myself how I would feel and what I would be thinking if it was my family members and my friends, the people I grew up with, who were in Syria right now.

It is such a messy situation over there. There is the status quo of the ruling regime, led by Mr. Assad, and then there are a variety of groups fighting in opposition. It always reminds me that there are those who fight and those who suffer. I am not saying that the ones who are involved in fighting are not suffering, but I am thinking of all the men, women and children who never chose this conflict. They did not decide or have any say whether this conflict should be happening in their homeland or not.

These are the families where the children just wanted to get up in the morning and go to school, or most of them did. They are the same families where the mothers wanted to cook meals and make sure their families were looked after. The families thought about the work they did, whether they worked for somebody else or were involved in agriculture or any of the other businesses. They are just normal families who wanted to get along with everyday normal tasks.

What happened? They woke up one morning and there was a conflict in their homeland.

It is not new to this part of the world, but its not being new does not make it more acceptable. I know it was contained in the beginning, but the way this civil war, if that is what we are calling it, has spread has been devastating. I cannot imagine too many communities in Syria being left untouched.

In the same way, I want to say to all the families of Syrian descent who live right here in our country that my heart goes out to them. I can only imagine the kind of anguish they go through day in and day out, because I have never experienced it.

● (2235)

Today I phoned my office and asked for an update on a particular case involving a Syrian family. I am not going to use anyone's name. The mom and baby are in Syria, and the father is over here.

The baby is a newborn, and the family is waiting for the baby's medical. While they are waiting for the medical, they are going through the anguish of trying to get to the closest visa office. They tell of the dangers that they will experience on the way. They would love to have a visa, even a tourist visa, to come over in the meantime, but their biggest problem is that travel is not safe, and there is no visa or consular office in Syria itself. The family will have to cross an international boundary; travel documents are needed for that, and not everybody has travel documents. If people do not have them, then they are stuck. They will have to get hold of somebody who will give them the travel documents they need.

Family members of this young man have been visiting my office on a regular basis. They heard the announcements that the government made about looking at ways to speed up reunification, especially for spouses who were separated. My colleague across the way said much work has been done and most of these people have been reunited, but many of the cases I deal with in my office are not unique. Right across Canada, there are many like the one I mentioned. My colleague across the way mentioned that he has not had any Syrians or relatives of people in Syria speak to him about the dire situation and the fear they live in, but I cannot imagine that he has not had anyone speak to him.

I want to talk about the role of the diaspora. Some people of Syrian descent have become Canadian citizens, while others are en route to becoming citizens. Some of Syrian descent have been born here. This is their home. These people are not asking for much. Under the family reunification class, these family members would actually qualify to come to Canada. We applied on their behalf long before there was any kind of freeze, and all we are asking right now is for those people to be expedited so they can get out of a very dangerous situation.

They have met with some officials who told them that it is dangerous everywhere in the area. One person was told he was in no more danger than the rest of the Syrians. That brings little comfort to the Canadian families over here.

Our officers overseas are doing their very best. Offices have been closed, consular services are not available and the few offices that are open in the Middle East area are being bombarded with requests. I admire these people for the work they do, but we really need to look at systems we can put in place to accelerate those who are already in the system, those who have applied.

To that effect, earlier in this session the opposition moved a motion that was unanimously supported in the House. The government agreed with the motion, which called on the government to support the peace-building efforts in Syria by making new financial contributions to the work of the UN-Arab League joint special envoy, Mr. Brahimi.

• (2240)

That was number one. Second was to provide emergency humanitarian assistance to address the growing refugee crisis in Syria. At no time have we ever said that all of those refugees can be taken in by Canada. What we have asked for is emergency humanitarian assistance.

S. O. 52

That is what the House asked for, by the way, not the NDP, even though it came from the NDP. I am very proud of the work done by the official opposition's critic of foreign affairs, the member for Ottawa Centre.

Also, we want to expedite the process of family reunification for Syrians who have family members in Canada. That is the bit that is very confusing for the Syrian diaspora. They are not asking for the doors to be opened. All they are asking for is that family reunification be accelerated for those who have families who are in a state of war.

If I were in their situation, I would want exactly the same. I think my colleagues across the aisle would agree that if they had family members, a parent, a younger brother, a spouse, or their own children, in Syria today, and they were Canadian citizens, they would want to be reunited with them and have them brought to a safe place. That is something very tangible. That is something very doable that we can address. I would urge the government to take action on that particular component.

In Canada, especially from the government side, we always hear about how important the family is, not once, but over and over again, and I agree. I come from an extended family. I have four brothers and a sister, and nephews, nieces, aunts and uncles. I love my extended family. I really believe in the strength of the family unit.

However, if we believe in families being together and the strength of the family for ourselves, then surely that is what we want for those who are separated from their families, not while their family members are carrying on with their everyday tasks—to be separated under those circumstances is painful enough—I want each and every one of us in this House to imagine the agony these Canadian families, or those who live in Canada of Syrian descent, are going through day in and day out.

In my riding of Newton—North Delta, we have had a series of unfortunate shootings. This was very tragic for our community. I can tell members that whenever we hear that there has been a gunshot in Surrey, if we have children, and even if we do not, we shake. I can remember that there was a time I would get up, even though I lived in Vancouver, to make sure my son was in his bedroom, just because I had heard of another shooting. That is how parents feel. That is how we feel about the people we love. That was only a shooting that happened in downtown Vancouver somewhere.

Here we are talking about violence day in and day out that is escalating. Now we are hearing stories of chemicals. We are also hearing stories of possibly increased conflict with bordering countries. We are also hearing from the bordering countries about the extra pressure on them as well. It is because of this that we absolutely have to do something around family reunification.

We also have to take a look at providing more humanitarian aid. Canadians have huge hearts. I can remember the disaster caused by Hurricane Katrina and how Canadians not only cried and poured out their hearts, but they also donated like one could not believe.

S. O. 52

• (2245)

When we had the earthquake in Haiti, it was the same, and the government stepped in and put in some matching dollars. I would argue that we have a huge crisis happening in the refugee camps in and around Syria, and I would say that this is the time for us to consider taking similar types of action.

I am a great believer in peace and the role Canada has played historically as a peacekeeper. I believe we have a diplomatic role to play as well. Unfortunately for us, and I am not going to point any fingers today, we no longer have a seat at the United Nations Security Council. Because of some of the actions we have taken over the last couple of years, we no longer have the same kind of standing with a lot of our international partners.

However, our current government has a very close relationship with China, and I am hoping that the Conservatives are using all of the diplomacy they are capable of to press China to intervene and help to move toward peace in Syria. I am also hoping that we are using our connections in Russia to do that as well, and with other people over whom we still have some influence.

When we disrespect some of the institutions at the United Nations, and we call into question the credibility of a rapporteur who would dare to come to Canada and make a comment on our aboriginal communities and the way those people they live and about food security for them, and when we have those reactions, it puts our credibility at risk when we go to talk to people and try to find allies, because suddenly the world is looking at Canada in a slightly different way.

There is still time. I do not think we have gone so far down the road that we cannot reverse and become that peace-loving and peacekeeping nation again. There is an opportunity in this case here, for the government to pull out all the diplomatic skills it can muster, to call in all the favours it may still have with people out there, to work toward finding a peaceful resolution. It is not going to come quickly. There are no easy fixes here, but the only thing we can do and the only thing that is left to us is to try to find people who will talk, because we are no longer on the inside. When we were on the Security Council, we were actually on the inside and had knowledge of what was going on, and people looked to us. Now we're in the outhouse; we are on the outside. When we are on the outside, we have to rebuild our credibility and we have to go and try to see what we can achieve.

This comment was made by Gulcan Akoguz, chargé d'affaires at the Turkish embassy. She said:

...we feel that Turkey's open door policy is actually absorbing the potential international reaction, since the tragic consequences of the brutality by the Syrian regime are all tackled by the neighbouring countries. What we expect from our partners is a serious engagement and meaningful contribution in sharing this burden.

This is not a country that is saying we want to shut our doors. This is a country that recognizes its humanitarian obligations, and all it is doing as it is calling out to the world is asking for some assistance with that and asking for a sharing of that burden, and that burden can be shared in many different ways.

There is the Red Cross, as well, and I could go on for another half hour.

• (2250)

I will end with this. We call upon the government to look at speeding up family reunification and providing humanitarian aid so that we can help countries like Turkey and others that are caught in the conflict.

As well, I would urge the government to sit down and have meetings with representatives of the diaspora so that we can find a way forward.

• (2255)

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed to hear the NDP once again talking Canada down when we have been at the forefront of humanitarian assistance in the Syrian crisis. In fact, the Minister of International Cooperation attended a funding conference in January and pledged even more Canadian money.

Canada is up to date on all of its contribution payments. However, we know that only 3% of all of the money that has been pledged has actually been paid. Canada is leading the way on paying our pledges.

I wonder if the member has any suggestions on how we can encourage the others who have made pledges of humanitarian assistance for Syria to come to the table, follow Canada's lead and pay what they have pledged.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I believe the parliamentary secretary when she says that we have paid our pledges. However, we need to take a look at that to see if we could do a bit more.

As a Canadian family, there are things we need to be doing. I want to talk about the Canadian diaspora. These are the people from the Canadian Syrian diaspora who are waiting to meet with the government and have not yet had a meeting, such as the Syrian Canadian Council, Syrian Christians for Democracy, the Syrian Expatriates Organization, the Watan organization, Canadian Relief for Syria, the Syrian Student Association, the Syrian Centre for Dialogue and the Syrian National Council.

If we are to find a way forward as Canadians, then surely these are the people we have to meet and engage with, and together find a way forward to find other ways to assist.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, my friend from Newton—North Delta mentioned Canada's increasingly close relationship with the People's Republic of China. One of the companies and state-owned enterprises in the People's Republic of China currently investing in the oil sands is Sinopec, which happens to be the single largest customer for Iranian oil. At the same time, the investments from China and the relationship with Syria are what blocked measures in the United Nations Security Council. China is a very close supporter of Bashar al-Assad.

In relation to the pressure to prevent oil revenue ending up funding terrorism in that region of the world, should our foreign policy extend to our trade policies with relation to the People's Republic of China? What more could we be doing there?

S. O. 52

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I can remember a time when the Prime Minister made a comment to the effect that we would only have truck or trade with countries that had good human rights records.

Our government has a relationship with China. Whether it is on a trading issue, which it obviously is, in our speed to sell off our Canadian jobs overseas and risk huge environmental damage, we have that relationship. Is the government using it wisely to at least press the Chinese to press Assad to find a peaceful solution? We need to continue to use that tool. It is at our disposal.

[Translation]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in my speech, I focused on the importance of helping the women and children who make up more than 50% of all the refugees involved in this conflict.

I also mentioned that sexual violence is used as a weapon of war that often, unfortunately, destroys communities.

I was particularly touched by the case she mentioned in her speech. She spoke about a woman and child who are in Syria right now and who are struggling to get to Canada. How come this woman and child are not being allowed to come to Canada?

We know that women and children are always the most vulnerable in conflict situations.

I ask the member to elaborate on the government's unwillingness and delay in allowing women and children, who could be saved from violence and potential trauma, to come to Canada.

What does my colleague think it will take for the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism to act?

• (2300)

[English]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, rape as a weapon of war is nothing new. We hear of it over and over again. It is very sad and actually breaks my heart.

There are growing stories of sexual violence and rape. There are stories of those things happening within the refugee camps and of their being used by the government forces, opposition forces and those who are just there and they happen to be abusive personalities.

During this time, I think that we as a country have a role to play. When we are talking about families who actually qualify to be sponsored into this country, who already have gone through the early stages and are just waiting for medicals, we should at least get them tourist visas and get them here while all of that gets completed. That would seem to be the humane thing to do.

We also have to work with our partners and agencies to make sure that we are addressing issues like this and that we are shining the light on these kinds of situations to protect women and children.

As a teacher, I dealt with the aftermath of refugees who came from very violent situations similar to this, and I can say that it leaves lifelong scars.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, some of the statements made in the member's speech were totally out of context.

My colleague gave a speech giving all the details of what this government has done regarding exactly what the member has been complaining about. It sounds to me like the NDP is selectively deaf and did not hear anything. My colleague talked about family reunification. He talked about expediting immigration. He talked about giving more capacity to our immigration office in Beirut. We are expediting everything that the member is talking about. Of course, violence is a very bad thing, but none of that registered with the NDP, and there she went with her emotional speech talking about all these things.

If the member really wants to have a debate, she should listen to what the government has done and then critique it, but do not come at it totally blind and not for one minute accept what has been said by my colleague about immigration. Members are totally blank on the other side.

Not only that, but this is a debate on Syria, and the member was talking about China, which, of course we told them about, but that does not register.

I sit here and wonder what we are doing here tonight. The government is giving all the information, but what do we get from the NDP? It is a totally selective blank, and then the member goes on about other things in her speech.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I want to tell my respected colleague across the way that the stories I am talking about, the ones that I hear in my office and others, are ongoing.

I will acknowledge that the government has made some accommodations, but we have a lot more work to do. I the Minister of Foreign Affairs himself say that there is a lot more work that we could be doing.

We are talking about the emotions of families of the Syrian diaspora. I do not apologize for getting emotional and talking about this emotionally. When families are in danger and are in a war zone, it is emotional and it does get to one's heart. We know the impact of war.

• (2305)

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Durham.

It has been more than two years since the start of the conflict in Syria. Canada, along with the international community, continues to be horrified by the ongoing violence. The growing number of civilian deaths and the influx of refugees fleeing Syria underscore the appalling impact of the conflict on the people of Syria.

S. O. 52

Since early 2011, millions of people have been affected by the violence in Syria, with many fleeing the country due to the deteriorating humanitarian situation. Recent reports estimate that 80,000 people have died in the ongoing conflict, and thousands more have been wounded. It is estimated that more than 6.8 million people, close to one-third of the country's population, are currently in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria. There are currently more than 1.4 million Syrian refugees in the neighbouring countries of Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt. Canada commends these countries for opening their doors and taking in so many displaced families under such difficult circumstances.

Since the beginning of the crisis, Canada, along with the international community, has continued to call for full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access to those in need. Given the enormity of needs, it is important that humanitarian assistance provided by the international community be coordinated. With Canada's support, humanitarian partners are providing lifesaving assistance and achieving tangible humanitarian results on the ground. I would like to highlight some examples.

Inside Syria, our support, combined with the support of others, has enabled the United Nations World Food Programme to reach two million people with emergency food assistance in March 2013 and to scale up operations to reach 2.5 million in April. Since the beginning of this year, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has distributed more than one million non-food basic relief items, such as mattresses, blankets, diapers, and kitchen sets to crisis-affected Syrians. The International Committee of the Red Cross has provided water treatment supplies, spare parts and generators. This ensured that more than 2.7 million people had access to drinking water between January and March of 2013.

Since the beginning of this year, the International Committee of the Red Cross, working with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, has delivered emergency food assistance to more than 600,000 vulnerable people. They have also distributed household kits, including mattresses, blankets, kitchen sets, hygiene kits and candles to over 200,000 crisis-affected people.

Canada's support does not end at Syria's borders. With so many Syrians pouring into neighbouring countries, we are supporting the regional approach of our humanitarian partners. Our partners on the ground tell us that thousands of Syrians are arriving in neighbouring countries every day, many in need of basic services, such as shelter, medical care, food and water.

Reports are showing that the strain on communities hosting refugees is compounding other challenges in neighbouring countries. Tensions in host communities are on the rise, mainly due to the gaps in support for communities. Acts of violence and aggression against refugees are being reported in hosting countries. The strain of hosting more than 448,000 refugees in Jordan, for example, is increasing tensions on scarce resources, including water, electricity, et cetera. In addition, Jordanians are facing high unemployment, high prices and poverty.

• (2310)

Canada has reacted quickly to the situation. Our support is helping to alleviate some of the challenges taking root in these countries. For example, in both Lebanon and Jordan, wait times for registration of

new refugees has been reduced. In Jordan, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees opened a new registration centre in Irbid in February and is registering approximately 700 refugees per day, in addition to the daily rate of around 1,000 refugees processed in Amman. Also in Jordan, our support to UNICEF has helped to provide access to safe drinking water to almost 175,000 people, and access to sanitation facilities for over 146,000 refugees.

In March 2013, the United Nations World Food Programme delivered emergency food assistance to more than 120,000 crisis-affected people through its voucher program. In addition to this, the entire refugee population of Zaatari camp, about 175,000 people, receives bread each day through the World Food Programme.

In Lebanon, Canada's support to the United Nations World Food Programme helped to feed over 150,000 Syrians in February 2013 alone. It also helped UNICEF to vaccinate at least 207,000 Syrian and Lebanese children against measles, and provided 17,000 affected children with psychological support services, and enrolled over 17,000 affected children in education and learning programs.

Our humanitarian partners weatherproofed 700 dwellings and rehabilitated more than 100 collective shelters. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees opened two new registration centres in February, bringing the total number of centres to four.

In Turkey, Canada's support helped the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees distribute tents, blankets and kitchen sets to over 220,000 refugees. It helped UNICEF enrol over 26,000 affected children in learning programs.

In Iraq, Canada's assistance to UNICEF helped provide 13,500 refugees with access to safe drinking water, and over 36,000 children and women with access to essential health services.

Canada will continue to look at ways to best support the Syrian population and to address the humanitarian needs arising from this crisis.

Despite this, we all know that this humanitarian assistance is not enough, and that a political solution to end the ongoing conflict must be found. Canada continues to support the efforts of the international community to bring about an end to the violence. We have repeatedly called on all parties to end the violence.

The violence in Syria must end. The people of Syria must be safe from violence. Civilians denied the necessities of life must be provided with humanitarian assistance.

I assure members that the Government of Canada will continue to work with our partners in an effort to end the suffering of civilians in Syria, and ensure life-saving assistance reaches all those who need it.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been around this debate a number of times. A numbers of times we have heard members from the opposite party saying the same things. As a matter of fact, I can probably quote one of the member's colleagues saying exactly the same words a year ago, July 5, 2012. The same words were said tonight.

S. O. 52

I am going to put it to the member very plainly. Does he agree with the notion that the Government of Canada, the government that he represents, should reach out to the community and listen to them, and match dollar for dollar what they raise, and also what they raise through NGOs?

The Syrian community of Canada has raised millions of dollars, by themselves and through NGOs. Is it not time that the member walks over to his colleague, the minister of CIDA, as well as the parliamentary secretary of CIDA, and says, "Hey, we have been shaken here. The community wants this." When is he going to do that?

• (2315)

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: Mr. Speaker, we have a crisis of a huge magnitude in Syria. I am proud of our country, our government and everything that Canada has been doing to help Syrian refugees and to help people affected by this conflict.

Today, our government has provided over \$80 million to those affected by the crisis in Syria. Can more be done? Should more be done? I do not think it would ever be enough. We have to use our joint efforts with all of the international community toward ending the crisis in Syria, ending the violence and ending the fighting. That is the only solution that would last and that is the only solution that Syrian people are waiting for.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, my question to the hon. member for Mississauga East—Cooksville is this. We have seen a disturbing trend in statements by the Minister of Foreign Affairs in relation to the United Nations. It is a kind of contempt for the United Nations, the idea of multilateralism and diplomacy, the idea that we will not go along to get along. I put it to him that in a conflict like Syria it becomes so very clear that when we seek a political solution, if we did not have the United Nations we would need to invent it.

For all its flaws, for all its failures, if we cannot get a multilateral solution with persistent pressure through the UN, through the Security Council, on Russia, on China and on those countries that have long-term relationships with Bashar al-Assad, we would not ourselves want to prop up someone like that, but now that the so-called rebel forces appear to be riddled with al Qaeda and we have the conflict spreading with potential destabilization with Israel's rocket attack, we are in really serious trouble. Would he not agree with me that we need the United Nations as the primary vehicle for getting to political peacemaking solutions?

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: Mr. Speaker, Canada has been working with the members of the United Nations and with other countries. Of course, I agree we have to talk with Russia and China. We have to talk with everyone. Russia and China are not the only countries that Mr. al-Assad has good relations with, or historically speaking, has had relations with. For whatever reason, they seem to support him.

However, the democratic countries of this world should get together with the United Nations on bilateral agreements to make sure that everything that can be done is done to end the violence and the armed conflict. Continuing violence and fighting will not solve anything. War does not solve anything. It has to come to peace for a lasting solution to be achieved.

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight in response to the request by the member for Toronto Centre to debate the situation in Syria in accordance with Standing Order 52(9).

Our government, and indeed most Canadians, have been following the situation in Syria very closely for the last two years, and particularly in the last few months. All Canadians are extremely concerned about the loss of life, human rights abuses, the destruction of property and the destabilizing impact the civil war has had on the region.

I think all members of the House share the desire for the conflict to come to an end and to see the Assad regime toppled. Our government has expressed this sentiment consistently for the last 18 to 24 months.

In recent weeks, an already terrible situation seems to be spiralling towards the depths of barbarism. The potential use of chemical weapons is something the world must examine closely and carefully. This need for careful examination stems from the fact that the use of these weapons will likely lead to a serious response by Canada and our international allies.

By now we have likely all seen the disturbing images from Syria of patients in hospitals who appear to be suffering the effects of a chemical toxin. These weapons have the potential for mass destruction and death. They would certainly cause greater suffering for the people of Syria and wider panic and instability in the region, which will lead to a rise in the number of refugees in border states and will raise the risk level in an already unstable part of the world.

Syria is not a signatory to the Chemical Weapons Convention. Canada is a signatory to the convention and has a long track record of working with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. Indeed, the United Nations and our allies in NATO have been watching the potential risk with respect to chemical weapons in Syria very closely.

The member for Toronto Centre has suggested in this debate tonight that there is some tension in the position of the government. In fact, the position of the government has been unequivocal. Assad must go, and the death and suffering needs to end.

The issue for our country and in this debate tonight is to determine what role Canada should play in the pursuit of these outcomes. In listening to the debate tonight, it is clear that the members of the House, including those from the Liberal Party, do not advocate direct military action.

Certainly, the Canadian Forces are one of the most highly trained and professional militaries in the world. However, a civilian protection mission would require boots on the ground. We are not prepared to do that.

Syrian air defence is considerably more developed than that in Libya. It is also more dense airspace, making any international multilateral military action extremely complicated and risky.

S. O. 52

It also seems clear that most members of the House do not advocate providing arms or military assistance to the rebels. I read a quote from the NDP critic stating that this was not Canada's approach. Finally, it appears that most members acknowledge that the civil war is not clearly demarcated by a monolithic rebel force on one side and the Assad regime on the other. The rebels may very well be a coalition of various groups within Syria opposed to the regime for different reasons. Most importantly, the rebels do not appear to share aspirations for a post-Assad Syria.

With all these points of agreement in mind, I would expect that most members of the House would agree with the government's approach to the Syrian crisis. The Prime Minister and this government have advocated a strong multilateral approach, with the United Nations and our allies, to apply strong diplomatic pressure on the regime and to investigate seriously the possible use of chemical weapons.

On March 21, the Secretary-General of the United Nations launched an investigation into the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria. Canada strongly supports this investigation. Any and all credible allegations, including potential incidents in Homs late last year, and more recently in Adra, will be pursued.

The UN has inspectors in Cyprus ready to conduct this investigation. These inspectors have been selected and trained and are ready to deploy on one day's notice. There just needs to be a cessation of hostilities or some form of security for this investigation to occur.

● (2320)

Canada was one of the first countries to pledge direct financial support for the United Nations investigation of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Canada has also provided some direct unilateral assistance to neighbouring countries dealing with the threat posed by chemical weapons. Detection equipment and protective gear have been provided to the Jordanian armed forces to guard against a chemical weapons or biological incident arising from Syria.

Canada has also provided support to strengthen civilian capabilities to respond to chemical or other attacks affecting the people of Jordan. We have also pledged support for the establishment of a regional biological risk management training centre at the Jordanian university in co-operation with our allies, the U.K. and the U.S.

At the time of this debate in our House of Commons this evening, the UN-led investigation into chemical weapons use and the threat they pose is at an impasse. This is not acceptable. Canada supports the UN Secretary-General's repeated efforts to resolve the current impasse so that all credible allegations are investigated as soon as possible.

Like our UN and NATO allies, Canada continues to demand that Syrian authorities grant full and unfettered access to the United Nations investigation team immediately. In recent weeks there have been news reports and even statements by UN officials that suggest there is evidence of the use of chemical weapons like sarin gas by both the Assad regime and a section of rebel forces.

While the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria quickly distanced itself from statements related to weapons use by the rebels, the

commission did state that it "has not reached conclusive findings as to the use of chemical weapons in Syria by any parties to the conflict".

The fog of war, the increased use of media as a tactical advantage and influence operations by parties in a modern conflict show the need for a UN-led investigation to provide clear answers. Canada is pursuing a clear but careful approach to Syria. We are working unilaterally with allies and with countries like Jordan in the region to address the threats caused by the conflict.

This government is also committed to our multilateral course of action with respect to Syria as well, working with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the United Nations. Canada has taken a principled and consistent stand on Syria. We will continue to work with our international partners to contain the threat caused by the situation in Syria, and we will continue to apply global pressure on the Assad regime.

These are very difficult times. This was a very good time for the House to revisit this issue and Canada's response. I think the careful and thoughtful deliberation by my colleagues tonight indicates that Canada cannot rush into an action engaging our military forces. We must keep this as a clear diplomatic effort on our part. We must clearly work with our allies, the United Nations, and NGOs working under the auspices of the United Nations, and our allies in NATO not only to assess the military threats on the region, but also to assess the real use of chemical weapons on the ground in Syria.

I appreciate the thoughtful comments from all sides of this debate, but I do think this government has pursued a very principled and rational approach. We are also dealing with the humanitarian crisis surrounding Syria, and we have heard tonight on all sides some acknowledgement that Canada has reacted with respect to refugees, particularly with regard to family reunification. I think even members on this side of the House have acknowledged we could do that perhaps faster and better, but it is clear from comments on the other side that those efforts are under way and that there is real and meaningful efforts by the minister to expedite family reunification, while also providing the appropriate oversight in relation to potential security risks that might be associated with widespread departures during a time of war.

● (2325)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague mentioned that the UN will broker a diplomatic and political solution to the situation.

I would like my colleague to talk about the contradiction in his speech. On the one hand, his government refuses to seek a seat at the UN Security Council, the most important international body with respect to conflict resolution. On the other hand, it refuses to accept its international responsibilities by pulling out of several treaties and taking positions that are roundly condemned by the international community.

How can they claim that the government will flex its diplomatic muscle when, in reality, the opposite is true?

S. O. 52

[*English*]

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague on the opposite side for her passion, and evidently her knowledge of the subject.

I would refer to my remarks where I highlighted not only Canada's unilateral effort, which is direct country to country, but our efforts multilaterally, through the United Nations and through work with our allies in NATO and around the world.

Importantly, she referenced the Security Council. The Security Council, which can authorize UN-sanctioned force in certain circumstances, has clearly already articulated that will not happen. There are two permanent members of that Security Council that will not allow the council to pursue a UN-sanctioned military effort.

This is an area where the UN is one important part of Canada's diplomatic statecraft in this effort, alongside unilateral relations and alongside direct visits by the minister to the region. There is a whole plethora of things that Canada is doing to apply pressure. The UN is one important part of that.

I would suggest to the hon. member that even a seat at the Security Council these days would not change what is coming from that.

• (2330)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I want to take this occasion, belated as it is, to congratulate the member on his election in November. I have not yet had an opportunity to put a question to the member for Durham.

When he speaks of presentations this evening that were thoughtful and calming, I must say his was one. It was thoughtful and it took into account what we all feel, that we must not be imagining for one moment that Canada wants to engage militarily in Syria. It is nice to reaffirm that there is consensus in this place on that. I also appreciate his recognition of the tool kit of statecraft and diplomacy of the United Nations, and our other relationships.

I would ask him very specifically if it would not make sense for us in this House to agree by consensus that there is more we can do in humanitarian effort, particularly in those very significant humanitarian crises that exist in refugee camps in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, by providing more assistance directly through humanitarian relief in the camps and by offering that assistance to those governments that are hosting all those refugees.

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, I thank the leader of the Green Party for her nice remarks in welcoming me. Certainly we have shared some time at Dalhousie Law School together, although not at the same time.

Her questions are good ones. We are working with other states in the region to address the refugee crisis caused by the Syrian civil war in the last two years. Members on this side have expressed that we need to do more and to particularly watch how that evolves.

There is also security ramifications caused by a refugee exodus under these circumstances. Importantly, I have also heard some discussion in the chamber tonight about NGOs and actions by non-state actors on the ground in Syria, and I think we have to express some words of caution.

We are not even at the halfway point in 2013. I would remind this House that Syria is in a state of war, and as I said in my remarks, with very hard to identify teams within that war. There is certainly a united front against a regime, and then there is the regime. There have been five journalists killed this year in Syria, and we are only days past Press Freedom Day. Last month, two archbishops were abducted. It is a country with which we have to proceed cautiously, even with non-state actors on the ground.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been around this block and this debate a couple of times in this House. Time and time again, the government states the same obvious thing and keeps saying how great it is doing. If we were to read the speeches from back then and read the speeches now, they say the same thing.

However, what the government is failing to understand is the engagement of the Syrian diaspora in Canada. The engagement of any diaspora at the time of need, at the time of destruction, be it man-made or be it a natural disaster, is very important. This lesson was learned very quickly when we had the earthquake in Bhuj, back in 2001, and the tsunami and the disaster in Muzaffarabad.

The Liberal government at the time set a protocol and the protocol was very simple: expedite family-class applications that are in the queue, husbands and wives, expedite parental applications, make an opportunity for people who want to sponsor their parents or grandparents or spouses to move them to the front of the line, match dollar for dollar what was raised by the community and work with the community so it can issue tax receipts. Those lessons were well appreciated by the community. Community members were engaged.

The current government, even though sometimes pushed, continued in that same vein. Do members remember the situation in Iraq? This particular government allowed for expedition of grandparents and parents out of Iraq, as well as spouses. The only thing people had to write in their application that went to the processing centre was "Iraq" and it was expedited.

The government, after being pushed in committee by myself and the member of Parliament from Kitchener at the time, moved to bring refugees from Iraq into Iraq, and that continued.

Then we come to Syria. The Syrian community has visited government members of Parliament, has met with the minister of external affairs and bluntly put to them, "There are two issues that we are looking for. One, help with immigration; two, help with the fundraising that we are doing by matching dollar for dollar." The community has raised millions of dollars. It worked with NGOs, government-approved NGOs. The community approached the government and said, "Will you please match dollar for dollar?" Not only did the government not even listen, it ignored the community.

Community members are trying very hard to meet with the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism so they can nail down if there is a program coming to them, as we have done for other communities.

S. O. 52

There is no such program coming to them, and there is no such hope that we will even go with matching dollar for dollar.

I heard a member saying tonight that we are expediting people from Syria. I reached out to the immigration offices at the posts in Lebanon, as well as in Amman, Jordan. When I said, "A lot of my constituents are asking if we are running any special programs for Syrian refugees", the answer was, "At this time, there are no special programs for Syrian refugees."

When I asked whether there was any expediting of parents and grandparents or whether we were taking any parental sponsorships, the answer was that no new applications to sponsor parents or grandparents have been accepted for up to 24 months, that parents and grandparents of Canadians citizens or permanent residents have the option of visiting Canada on a parental and grandparent super visa.

In order to issue a visitor visa to a parent or a grandparent, it must mean that they have something to go back to in order to come to Canada and say, "I am a visitor. That means that I am going to go back to my place that I am coming from."

Well, definitely no parent or grandparent is going to go back to what is happening in Syria, so the chances of getting a super visa are slim to none.

Then I asked the question, "Are we taking any Syrian refugees?" and the answer was, "The Government of Canada is deeply concerned about the crisis in Syria and will continue to do whatever we can do best to help the Syrian people."

There is no word in here about taking in Syrian refugees.

Another question I posed to the post was, "Are we expediting independent class applications from Syria?" The answer was, "At this time, there are no special programs for Syrians to expedite their federal skilled worker applications."

● (2335)

Clearly the government is failing the Syrian diaspora by not responding to their request to issue special visitor visas for their loved ones to come from Syria in order to get the program going again for parents and grandparents. It is a total travesty.

Then we come to the point where the community has asked to be allowed to match dollar for dollar. I had a press conference last week. The Syrian representative said he went next door and received \$500 from his neighbour.

It is not only the Canadian diaspora, but the Canadian public needs to look at what is happening in Syria every day. We see it every night on our televisions. We read about it every day in the press or on the Internet. Canadians want to get engaged. They want to contribute. However, the Conservative government is not going to match dollar for dollar.

The parliamentary secretary to the minister responsible for CIDA said that the community only raised \$30,000. I challenge the parliamentary secretary to sit down and speak with the Syrian Canadian Council, with Syrian organizations, and ask them how much money they have raised. She will hear that it is millions of dollars, yet the government will not work with them. Not only will

the government not match them dollar for dollar, but it will not work with these organizations in order to ensure they get a one-time receipt application so they can give tax receipts. This is another travesty.

The Conservative government does not care. Why does it not care? It cared for other communities. It worked with other communities. Why will it not work with the Syrian community? I wonder if there is an underlying situation that is causing it not to help the Syrians. The government does not care about Syrians. They do not matter. It might be because the Syrians do not vote for the Conservatives. It is not in their reform-alliance base to want to engage the Syrians.

Why is the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration playing peekaboo? Why does he say he is going to meet with Syrians but then he does not? Members of Parliament have said that the minister met here and there with Syrians. I challenged the member for Richmond Hill to tell us where the minister met with Syrians. We have not yet heard from one Conservative member of Parliament who can tell us that the minister met with this group on this date and at this place. It would indeed be a pleasure to hear that from them. If the minister is watching tonight, maybe tomorrow he will come into this Chamber and he will ask for unanimous consent to table something indicating where he met with individuals. I have yet to hear from any Syrians in Canada, or from any members of parties opposite, about a date or a place that they have met.

The Syrian community wanted to meet with the minister. It wrote and it called the minister. It emailed the minister. It received a reply. The Syrian community responded back to Mr. Braun of the minister's office and it said:

Thank you for the phone conversation and we look forward to receiving a positive response to our request for a meeting with the Honourable Minister.

In anticipation of the meeting, please find attached our proposals for government action to help the victims of the disaster in Syria.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best Regards.

That was on February 19. That was two and a half months ago. The Syrian community is still waiting to hear from the minister telling them that he is going to meet with them. They are waiting to hear from the minister about the programs he will put forward in order to help them and the diaspora.

There are hundreds of thousands of people who have been displaced. There are 70,000-plus people who have been killed. Our thoughts and prayers are with them.

Bishops have been abducted, and we issue press releases. There has to be something more concrete than just issuing press releases. We are monitoring the situation in Syria. Our hearts and prayers are with the Syrians. The community thanks us for the press release and the good words and asks us to put this into action.

● (2340)

Canadian Syrians have family that they can sponsor. Then they are waiting and waiting for a phone call or a signal from the government that it is going to do this.

S. O. 52

We did it for others; why are we not doing it for the Syrians? Previous governments did it for Sri Lanka, for India and for Pakistan. The current government did it for a number of places, China being one of them, after the earthquake and after it was pushed. Why not from Syria?

Why is the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism going to the Middle East and saying that we are going to take thousands of refugees? He goes to the camps where the Syrians are and says we are going to take thousands of refugees. The only thing he does not say clearly is that we are going to continue the program we already have—for Iraqis. That is old news from yesterday and the day before.

The minister does not announce that we are going to take thousands of UNHCR-accepted refugees into Canada; he does not announce that. He says that we are going to take thousands of refugees in the program that already exists, and it is only for the Iraqis.

It is the same thing that he said to the Coptic community in Toronto about a year ago. After the difficulties with the Copts, he said to that community that we were taking refugees from the Middle East, and the Coptic community is still waiting.

It is the same thing with the Syrian community. They are still waiting for that phone call. They are waiting for the something that says we are going to engage them.

What has happened in Syria with the use of gas and the difficulties that exist with the neighbours beside them was put forward eloquently here tonight by all sides. Members on all sides were saying that what is happening there is a tragedy, but there are two things we have not done.

The current government has a Reform base and always caters to that base, and there are two things it does not want to do. It does not want to open the doors to people who want to sponsor people from Syria. The Conservatives do not want to open the doors to children who want to sponsor their parents and bring them to Canada. They are saying they can come on a super visa; when that is over, they will kick them back.

If I am in Canada and my parents are in a place that is undergoing difficulties such as those Syria, and I know I can look after them on a daily basis and I know I have the money to care for them, I do not see why my country, the country I am paying tax in, will not allow that to happen when it allowed it to happen from other countries. The Syrian diaspora is asking, “Why not us? Why is our government not responding in the same way that it responded to others?”

The people of that community even go further: they say they will help by donating money, millions of dollars, to the Red Cross, World Vision and government-approved NGOs, and they ask us to match them. Funding in the thousands and millions of dollars was matched for other countries, so the question again is, why not for Syria?

I am perplexed, really perplexed, that although all of Canada wants to engage, open its pockets and give, the Government of Canada certainly is not engaging. I am not sure if it has a hidden agenda or if it dislikes the Syrian diaspora; I am not sure what the case situation is, but it is certainly not engaging.

My question is this: will the government members please find some soft part in their hearts to allow the Syrian community to adopt their parents and grandparents in order for them to be able to come to Canada? Will it allow the community to sponsor people that have been determined to be refugees and have been accepted by UNHCR to come to Canada? The community will step forward and look after them.

● (2345)

Last but not least, we should work with the Syrian diaspora to match dollar for dollar what it is raising, what it has raised by itself and through government-approved NGOs, so that it is not left out and to make sure that all communities are treated equally. Engagement in community is first and foremost. We must give communities the tools to build nations. There is nothing more important at this point in time than engaging the Syrian diaspora and providing sustainable development for nation building.

Syria is in ruins. Syria must be rebuilt after the civil war is over. If we do not engage the Syrian Canadian diaspora, we will have failed. There is no one better, who knows the situation on the ground and the language, and has the capabilities to rebuild the country than the diaspora in Canada.

● (2350)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I just came across news that was posted about an hour ago on Al Jazeera's website that all Internet connections between Syria and the rest of the world appear to have been severed. It is too early to know who did this or if it is a temporary disruption, but certainly there is a lot of concern because the eyes and ears of the world, and Google is reporting this today as well, have had some glimpse into what is happening in Syria, the humanitarian crisis, the loss of life, through the actions of, essentially, citizen journalists able to use the Internet.

I do not so much have a question, but as the minutes draw down on this debate, I would reinforce what we all know, that this situation is desperate and tragic, a humanitarian crisis, that it worsens by the minute, and that signs of hope for a peaceful solution are few and far between. We also had one of those earlier today in the commitments made by Mr. Putin and U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry.

I certainly urge all colleagues, though I do not think I need to as we all feel the same way, not to let this crisis slip from our awareness and to find ways as a nation united to help people who are caught in this conflict, particularly the women and children. All Syrians in Syria and in the refugee camps need our help. I agree with the member for Scarborough—Agincourt completely that the Syrian community here in Canada should be engaged to try to find ways to help the people currently suffering.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Speaker, indeed, the news from Al Jazeera came an hour ago. This is not the first time this has been done in Syria. It was also done last November.

S. O. 52

The situation on the ground is terrible. I understand that today peacekeepers were either killed or abducted. The situation in Syria needs to be watched and we need to be engaged. It is a real shame that as Canadians we do not issue press releases. We are not engaging, not only the community in Canada but the international community, in making a difference, being a middle power, on the international stage. It is a real shame that we have not been able to do that.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is almost midnight and we are here debating because there is a civil war happening in Syria and we do need multilateral engagement and a multilateral solution. However, I find it a little rich for the Conservative government to disengage with the United Nations but now, today, rely on the same body to come up with a solution.

Canada has lost so much ground on the global scene. We have lost our seat on the Security Council. We have lost our ranking among the nations around the world. We used to be known as a peacekeeping nation that was in love with humanitarian aid, a country that was there at the beck and call of the world. We are not that country anymore.

Having said that, we know there is a crisis in Syria. We have heard members of the government say there is a crisis in Syria right now and it requires urgent address from our government.

I would like to speak about one aspect of this war, which is the women and children who are affected by it. As a woman, I am particularly moved by the fact that the majority of the Syrian refugees are indeed women and children.

I would like to share a personnel story.

I was born in the middle of a war, and I am probably one of the few members in the House of Commons who have lived through a war. It is not something a child should ever go through. I was smuggled in the cover of night with my mother and sisters, which was necessary in order to be safe. If one travelled in daylight, as a woman, one would be exposed to rape, which is used as a weapon of war. One would be exposed to extortion for oneself and one's daughters. I know that is not a condition under which anybody anywhere in the world should have to live. Being a child who witnessed people being bombed, and being shot at myself, I know we should not have any child in this world experience that.

Although I experienced being shot at when I was four or five years old, today it is still a vivid memory. It is as if it were yesterday. Since I have had the privilege to live, literally a second chance at life, I have the opportunity today to speak on behalf of those hundreds of thousands of people who remain voiceless, who do not have that opportunity.

Those children and women who are being victimized by this war did not choose to be part of it. It is up to the international community

to speak up for them. It is up to us, as parliamentarians who have the privilege of speaking up for them, to actually do so.

We know this conflict has claimed more than 70,000 lives and it has forced more than one million Syrians to flee as refugees. Many are internally displaced people within the country and within the region. Many of these refugees have been recognized by the United Nations; they have UNHCR refugee cards.

It is our responsibility as global citizens to stand up for them. It is up to Canada as a have nation, not a have-not nation, to be the conscience of the world. Canada is a bountiful nation that has so many resources and richness.

● (2355)

It is up to us to be the conscience of the world. That is what Canada is known for. We are known for our history and for our legacy of being the conscience of the world. Having that history of being the humanitarian country, we are duty bound to these hundreds of thousands of people who are now being displaced, who are being affected by war.

We need to ensure there are not more and more children who are being inflicted with lifelong memories of war. It is our responsibility to remove those children from those situations. It is our responsibility to reunite families.

We know there are many people here in Canada of Syrian descent who have sponsored their spouses, siblings, nieces and nephews. We, as responsible parliamentarians, have the duty to ensure we are reuniting these families.

I know that my time is coming to an end, and with that I will leave the House with my last request for the government. My request to the government is that the government respect the wish of this House. When the NDP brought forward a motion, it was unanimously agreed to by this entire House. The motion called for support of the peace-building efforts in Syria; it called for the provision of emergency humanitarian assistance to the Syrians, to the families, to the Syrians who had families in Canada; and it called for us to expedite the process of family reunification for Syrians who have family members in Canada.

This was a motion that was unanimously agreed to by this entire House. My request to the government is that it respect the wishes of this House and that it provide that humanitarian relief, as well as expediting family reunification.

● (2400)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: It being midnight, I declare that the motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. The House stands adjourned until later today at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at midnight.)

CONTENTS

Tuesday, May 7, 2013

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS			
Government Response to Petitions			
Mr. Lukiwski	16379	Mr. Cleary	16382
Navigable Waters Protection Act		Mr. Del Mastro	16383
Mr. Scott	16379	Mr. Marston	16384
Bill C-506. Introduction and first reading	16379	Mrs. Smith	16384
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	16379	Mr. Sullivan	16386
Expansion and Conservation of Canada's National Parks Act		Mr. Easter	16386
Mr. MacKay (for the Minister of the Environment)	16379	Mr. MacKenzie	16386
Bill S-15. First reading	16379	Mr. Sullivan	16388
(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)	16379	Ms. Sgro	16388
Petitions		Mr. Watson	16388
Genetically Modified Alfalfa		Ms. Sgro	16388
Mr. Dreeshen	16379	Mr. Menzies	16390
Nuclear Fuel Processing Licence		Mr. Dubé	16390
Mr. Cash	16379	Mr. Lobb	16391
Consumer Protection		Mr. Nantel	16392
Mr. Cash	16379	Mr. Casey	16392
Sex Selection		Mr. Fortin	16393
Mr. Benoit	16379	Mr. Cash	16394
Rights of the Unborn		Mr. Sorenson	16394
Mr. Benoit	16380	Mr. Sorenson	16395
Genetically Modified Organisms		Mr. Angus	16396
Mr. Sullivan	16380	Mr. Lamoureux	16396
Telecommunications		Ms. Sims	16397
Mr. Dionne Labelle	16380	Mr. Angus	16398
Canada Post		Mr. Lamoureux	16398
Ms. Boivin	16380	Mr. Young (Oakville)	16399
Trafficking in Persons and Sexual Exploitation		Mr. Sullivan	16400
Ms. Boivin	16380	Mr. Lamoureux	16401
Health		Mr. Kellway	16401
Ms. Boivin	16380	Mr. Benoit	16402
Lyme Disease		Ms. May	16403
Ms. May	16380	Mr. Benoit	16403
The Environment		Mr. Benoit	16403
Ms. May	16380	Mrs. Sellah	16404
Impaired Driving		Mr. Easter	16405
Mr. Warawa	16380	Mr. Dionne Labelle	16405
Sex Selection		Ms. Borg	16407
Mr. Warawa	16380	Mr. Lamoureux	16407
Questions on the Order Paper		Mr. Menegakis	16407
Mr. Lukiwski	16380	Mr. Giguère	16408
GOVERNMENT ORDERS		Mr. Easter	16409
Economic Action Plan 2013 Act, No. 1		Mr. Lamoureux	16409
Bill C-60. Second reading	16380	Mr. Albas	16410
Mr. Poilievre	16381	Mr. Valeriote	16410
Mr. Boulerice	16381	Mr. Lauzon	16411
Mr. Lamoureux	16382	STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS	
		Syria	
		Mrs. Mourani	16412
		Arctic Council	
		Mr. Tilson	16412
		Beloeil–Mont-Saint-Hilaire Historical Society	
		Mr. Dubé	16412

National March for Life	
Mr. Benoit	16413
Veterans Affairs	
Mr. Casey	16413
Grey and Simcoe Foresters	
Mr. Brown (Barrie).....	16413
Sports Betting	
Mr. Masse	16413
Alberta Sports Teams	
Mr. Dreeshen	16414
Dance in Manitoba	
Ms. Bateman	16414
Buffet of Nations	
Mr. Dusseault.....	16414
Mental Health Week	
Mrs. Smith	16414
Human Rights	
Mr. Marston	16414
Correctional Service of Canada	
Mr. Hawn.....	16415
Birthday Congratulations	
Mr. MacAulay.....	16415
Leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada	
Mr. Seeback.....	16415
Veterans Affairs	
Mr. Rafferty	16415
The Economy	
Mr. Trottier.....	16415

ORAL QUESTIONS

Government Expenditures	
Mr. Mulcair.....	16416
Mr. Harper.....	16416
Mr. Mulcair.....	16416
Mr. Harper.....	16416
Employment	
Mr. Mulcair.....	16416
Mr. Harper.....	16416
Mr. Mulcair.....	16416
Mr. Harper.....	16417
Mr. Mulcair.....	16417
Mr. Harper.....	16417
Government Advertising	
Mr. Trudeau	16417
Mr. Harper.....	16417
Mr. Trudeau	16417
Mr. Harper.....	16417
Mr. Trudeau	16417
Mr. Harper.....	16417
Science and Technology	
Ms. Quach.....	16418

Mr. Goodyear.....	16418
Mr. Stewart.....	16418
Mr. Goodyear.....	16418
Ethics	
Mr. Angus.....	16418
Mr. Van Loan.....	16418
Mr. Boulerice.....	16418
Mr. Van Loan.....	16418
Employment	
Mrs. Groguhé.....	16418
Ms. Finley.....	16419
Ms. Boutin-Sweet.....	16419
Ms. Finley.....	16419
Ms. Boutin-Sweet.....	16419
Ms. Finley.....	16419
Ms. Sims	16419
Mr. Kenney.....	16419
Mr. Godin.....	16419
Mr. Kenney.....	16420
Pensions	
Ms. Sgro.....	16420
Mr. Menzies.....	16420
Mr. Pacetti.....	16420
Mr. Bernier.....	16420
Employment	
Mr. Brison.....	16420
Ms. Finley.....	16420
Royal Canadian Mounted Police	
Mr. Garrison.....	16420
Mr. Toews.....	16421
Ms. Boivin.....	16421
Mr. Toews.....	16421
Statistics Canada	
Ms. Boivin.....	16421
Mr. Paradis	16421
Mr. Harris (Scarborough Southwest).....	16421
Mr. Paradis	16421
Aboriginal Affairs	
Ms. Bateman	16421
Ms. Ambrose.....	16422
Library and Archives Canada	
Mr. Cash.....	16422
Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam).....	16422
Mr. Nantel.....	16422
Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam).....	16422
The Environment	
Ms. Leslie.....	16422
Mr. Anderson.....	16422
Ms. Leslie.....	16422
Mr. Anderson.....	16422
Tourism Industry	
Ms. Murray.....	16423
Mr. Bernier.....	16423
Mr. Easter.....	16423

Mr. Bernier	16423
Mr. Toone	16423
Mr. Ashfield	16423
Mr. Toone	16423
Mr. Ashfield	16423
Natural Resources	
Mr. Storseth	16423
Mr. Anderson	16423
Library and Archives Canada	
Mr. Simms	16424
Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	16424
Pensions	
Ms. Mathysen	16424
Mr. Menzies	16424
The Budget	
Mr. Lizon	16424
Mr. Flaherty	16424
Justice	
Mr. Sullivan	16424
Mr. Paradis	16424
Government Programs	
Mr. Fortin	16424
Ms. Finley	16425

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Economic Action Plan 2013 Act, No. 1	
Bill C-60. Second reading	16425
Mr. Nantel	16425
Mr. Rousseau	16427
Mr. Lamoureux	16427
Ms. Sitsabaiesan	16427
Ms. Leitch	16428
Mr. Caron	16430
Mr. Hsu	16430
Mr. Sopuck	16430
Message from the Senate	
The Acting Speaker (Mr. Stanton)	16430
Economic Action Plan 2013 Act, No. 1	
Bill C-60. Second reading	16430
Mr. Ravignat	16430
Mr. Sopuck	16432
Mr. Lamoureux	16432
Mr. Rousseau	16432
Mr. Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	16433
Ms. Péclet	16434
Ms. May	16435
Mr. Lamoureux	16435
Ms. Brosseau	16435
Mr. Sopuck	16437
Mr. Lamoureux	16437
Mr. Tremblay	16437
Situation in Syria	
M. Van Loan	16437

Motion	16437
(Motion agreed to)	16438
Safe Drinking Water for First Nations Act	
Bill S-8—Notice of time allocation motion	
Mr. Van Loan	16438
Bill C-60—Economic Action Plan 2013 Act, No. 1	
Bill C-60. Second reading	16438
Mr. Sopuck	16438
Mr. Ravignat	16439
Mr. Hsu	16439
Ms. May	16440
Mr. Simms	16440

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Criminal Code	
(Bill C-413. On the Order: Private Members' Business:.)	16442
(Bill C-414. On the Order: Private Members' Business:.)	16442
Mrs. Groguhé	16442
Motion	16442
(Order discharged and bills withdrawn)	16442

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Economic Action Plan 2013 Act, No. 1	
Mr. Garrison	16442
Mr. Tremblay	16442
Mr. Del Mastro	16443
Mr. Butt	16443
Amendment negatived	16445
Motion agreed to	16446
(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)	16446

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Korean War Veterans Day Act	
Mr. Calkins	16446
Bill S-213. Second reading	16446
Mr. Scott	16448
Ms. Leitch	16449
Mr. Chicoine	16449
Mr. Casey	16450
Division on motion deferred	16451

EMERGENCY DEBATE

Situation in Syria	
Mr. Rae	16451
Motion	16451
Mr. Dechert	16454
Mr. Dewar	16455
Mr. Eyking	16455
Mrs. Mourani	16455
Mr. Baird	16456
Mr. Dewar	16459
Mr. Karygiannis	16459
Mrs. Mourani	16459
Mr. Dechert	16460
Mr. Dewar	16460

Mr. Obhrai	16462	Mr. Dion	16476
Mr. Karygiannis	16463	Mrs. Groguhé	16476
Ms. Péclet	16463	Mr. Menegakis	16477
Ms. May	16464	Mr. Rae	16477
Mr. Obhrai	16464	Ms. Laverdière	16478
Mr. Dewar	16465	Mr. Lunney	16478
Mr. Rae	16465	Mr. Rae	16479
Mr. Dechert	16466	Ms. Sims	16479
Mr. Dechert	16466	Mr. Menegakis	16480
Mrs. Groguhé	16467	Ms. Péclet	16481
Mr. Rae	16467	Mr. Karygiannis	16481
Ms. Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	16468	Ms. May	16482
Ms. Péclet	16468	Ms. Sims	16482
Ms. Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	16470	Ms. Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	16484
Mr. Karygiannis	16470	Ms. May	16484
Ms. Sims	16471	Ms. Péclet	16485
Ms. May	16471	Mr. Obhrai	16485
Ms. Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	16471	Mr. Lizon	16485
Mr. Eyking	16472	Mr. Karygiannis	16486
Mr. Dechert	16472	Ms. May	16487
Ms. May	16473	Mr. O'Toole	16487
Mr. Butt	16473	Ms. Péclet	16488
Ms. Péclet	16474	Ms. May	16489
Mr. Rae	16474	Mr. Karygiannis	16489
Mr. Dechert	16474	Ms. May	16491
Ms. Laverdière	16475	Ms. Sitsabaiesan	16492
Ms. Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	16476		

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>