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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, February 20, 2007

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, February 20, 2007

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)
[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-406, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (victim restitution).

He said: Mr. Speaker, the NDP has a very comprehensive crime fighting strategy. We believe the most effective crime fighting strategy is to ensure the crimes are not committed in the first place.

One of the components that we have talked about as well is ensuring victims are adequately compensated. My bill, an act to amend the Criminal Code for victim restitution, would change the word “may” to “shall” in subsection 738.1 of the Criminal Code. In other words, this would direct judges, as opposed to allowing them leeway, to order that offenders make restitution to victims of their crimes.

By ensuring that direction is provided to judges, rather than leaving it as an option, would help to fast track compensation for crime victims. We believe this is very important.

We will continue to fight to ensure that crimes are not committed and that resources are available in the community but when there are victims of crime we believe that restitution should be provided and that is the intention of this private member's bill.

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

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—NATIONAL ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, there is a growing prosperity gap in Canada that is making it harder for working and middle-class families to make ends meet and sees more and more Canadians, including women, children, seniors, aboriginal people and people with disabilities, slipping into poverty and therefore calls on the government, in cooperation with the provinces and territories, to implement a national anti-poverty strategy beginning with the reinstatement of the federal minimum wage to be initially set at \$10 per hour.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to stand in the House today to move our party's motion that calls for a national anti-poverty strategy beginning with the reinstatement of the \$10 minimum wage.

I will be sharing my time with the member for Parkdale—High Park.

Over the course of today, my party will lay out what we see as the elements of a national anti-poverty plan.

Before I got into politics in 1990, I was a soup kitchen director. I got into politics to fight poverty and, 17 years later, I am still fighting. I wish I could say the fight was over.

As I travelled across Canada over the past two years, first on a tour looking at early learning for children and, more recently, talking with people about poverty and the growing prosperity gap, I was struck by the deep level of compassion and caring that exists. However, people are increasingly uneasy about the disparity they see around them and their own tenuous grip on some security for themselves and their families.

They remember a time when community mattered and government could and did make a difference. Canada has a rich tradition and history of gathering together as a community against geography, distance and weather to ensure that no one got left behind or was forgotten.

People are looking for a vision consistent with the Canadian story, where we wove a safety net of basic income, health care, education, unemployment insurance and pensions for all, the kind of vision that Canadians still remember. It was no accident that Tommy Douglas was voted the greatest Canadian.

Business of Supply

Today there is a competing vision, one vision playing itself out over the last 15 years, rooted in the Margaret Thatcher thesis that there really is no such thing as society, rather a world of individuals who see money and the market as the driving force behind all human activity. The result is a growing uneasiness and dissatisfaction. There is a poverty and inequality that are symptoms of a structural dysfunction affecting more and more of our citizens and newcomers to our land.

Thomas Walkom wrote recently in the *Toronto Star*:

—the poor are the canaries in the coal mine. The deliberate attempts to reconfigure Canada over the past 30 years—by gutting social programs, dismantling national institutions and insisting that market forces alone can solve every problem—have affected everyone. But they've hit the poor first and hardest.

Mr. Walkom goes on to say:

We shouldn't care about poverty just to be nice. We should care about poverty because, in the end, this story isn't just about the 11 per cent or 16 per cent of the population...officially designated as low-income. It is about the deliberate erosion of middle-class Canada. It's about us, too.

Over the past nine months, I have travelled across the country to communities big and small. I have seen and heard the stories of misery and hurt and the tremendous effort of good people with little resource trying to make a difference. It is what I call a bad news-good news and yet even more bad news story.

The bad news is that the statistics flowing from institutions like the National Council of Welfare indicate that poverty is more pervasive and deeper than ever. The good news is that we are hearing about it again. For too long, it has been hidden and invisible. National newspapers are writing about poverty. People are willing to come to meetings to talk about it.

However, the even more bad news is why we are hearing about poverty again. The number of homeless is estimated to be as high as 250,000 and in places that we would never expect. Studies are showing alarmingly high numbers of people working full time all year and yet not earning enough to make ends meet.

● (1010)

I have been travelling on an anti-poverty campaign to learn first-hand about its reality in our country. I made a commitment to bring those stories, hopes and recommendations back to Parliament.

In Calgary and Victoria, two communities where the economy is booming, there is no affordable housing. Alarming numbers of people are living on the street as shelters, church halls and warehouses prove insufficient. The homeless are in the very shadows of the prosperous oil companies with their tax breaks.

In Calgary, I visited a shelter that beds down on floormats 1,000 to 1,200 of the 3,500-plus homeless living in that city. I watched as two city buses took another 100 or so to the suburbs to be bedded down on mats in warehouses. The rest find refuge where they can, most under bridges and in parks, while city hall passes laws making it criminal behaviour to do so.

A few will turn to crack and crystal meth, since, as I was told by street workers, it takes away any feeling of hunger, cold and fear. However, that lasts only five to ten minutes and they need another hit, which, in turn, leaves our streets dangerous places.

Other stories emerge. In Halifax, I was told of the disproportionate number of women facing poverty; women who go hungry to feed their children; the disappearance of good, well paying jobs in the manufacturing sector in the Niagara-Hamilton corridor of Ontario; the overwhelming aboriginal face of truly destitute poverty in Thunder Bay; the huge increases in health issues for people living in the poorer neighbourhoods of Saskatoon; whole families living in motel rooms through the winter in the Penticton area of B.C., then disappearing, with children gone from school when the tourists arrive in the spring. It is thought that they live in the mountains and campgrounds while picking fruit and working on farms to make a living. I was also told about the more than 50 disabled people living on the streets of Victoria, and the deteriorating and diseased stock of affordable housing in Toronto and Vancouver.

Canada has not had a national affordable housing program in over 15 years and what does exist is being torn down and replaced with expensive condos at an alarming rate.

About 175 people gathered in Castlegar, B.C. and told me of their struggles to get ahead, the roadblocks, the lack of resources and the cutbacks, in particular to early learning and child care.

Students at Brock University in St. Catharines told me about the challenges they face trying to access post-secondary education, the ever-increasing tuition and ancillary fees and the cost of housing and living expenses, while summer work is harder to get and pays only minimum wage that does not keep pace with inflation.

Poverty is debilitating and mind numbing. Poverty can paralyze and kill the spirit. Combined with thoughtless, harmful public policy, poverty can rip out our hearts and souls. Poverty can actually kill.

I remember the summer of 2001 and the story of Kimberly Rogers. Kimberly lived on social assistance and decided to go to college to better her situation. She was in her third year, soon to graduate, when she successfully applied for a student loan. What she did not know was that the Mike Harris government in Ontario at that time had passed legislation to make it illegal, criminal behaviour, to be in receipt of social assistance and also collect a student loan. She was charged, pleaded guilty and sentenced to house arrest. On the hottest day of August, in the summer of 2001, Kimberly Rogers and her unborn child died in that apartment living out her sentence. That should never happen in this country and we should never let it happen again.

Business of Supply

•(1015)

Today we are calling for a national anti-poverty strategy, starting with the reinstatement of a federal minimum wage of \$10 an hour. We do not have to reinvent the wheel. Jurisdictions in the European Union and elsewhere are proposing national plans to combat poverty. They are doing this with noticeably early success and have now been joined by a couple of our own provinces, with an anti-poverty law in Quebec and a poverty reducing strategy in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The National Council of Welfare has presented a framework for action, a poverty plan with targets and timelines, a budget, accountability, and the establishment of official poverty indicators. Groups across the country are doing some very creative things. They are looking for national leadership. Let us take advantage of this opportunity with this minority government to do the right thing for families, for our neighbours, for working men and women, and for the at risk and marginalized.

We have an economic boom in many parts of our country. Sadly, we also have a poverty boom. We can do better. We must do better for each and every Canadian and newcomer, for our poor on assistance, for the 650,000 working poor in our country, for women, children, seniors, veterans and persons with disabilities, who all struggle with unacceptable levels of poverty.

We must fundamentally right the wrongs and honour the obligations we have to our first nations, Métis and Inuit. It is all about human rights, justice and fairness.

People are watching us today to see if we can find the political will to win this fight. For their sake, for our sake and for Canada's sake, we must.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for moving the motion, which will be supported by the Liberal Party because we also stand for social justice and fair income distribution.

The member spent a lot of time talking about homelessness as an element of poverty. He is quite right, but our federal government also funded, some years ago, the Anne Golden report on homelessness in Toronto. It was interesting to note that of the homeless in Toronto, 35% suffered from mental illness and 27% were youth alienated from their families, of which 75% of those youth had experienced physical or mental abuse, and 12% represented aboriginals off reserve.

It is clear that poverty is not just an economic problem. It is not just a matter of throwing money at it and pretending it will go away. Real social elements are involved in terms of developing a national strategy on the alleviation of poverty.

The member will also know that the media has somehow picked up that the federal minimum wage being reinstated would somehow override the provincial minimum wage, which is certainly not the case. There is no jurisdiction. The provinces can deal with their own minimum wage scenarios. We are talking only about 18,000 workers under the federal labour code who are currently subject to the minimum wage.

Does the member agree that more than economic tools are necessary to deal with poverty alleviation in Canada?

Mr. Tony Martin: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his commitment on behalf of his party that its members will support this motion. This is certainly a non-partisan issue. There is tremendous poverty out there and we need to get at it and address it.

He is indeed right that it is going to require the efforts of all of us. It is going to require a very comprehensive anti-poverty strategy, such as is happening in other jurisdictions around the world.

It is a very complicated issue. However, we must start somewhere. When we talk to the poor, one of the first things they say is that they do not have enough money. They do not have enough money to pay their rent. They do not have enough money to buy food to feed their kids.

That is why today we think the federal government should set the tone. We should set a benchmark. Even though poverty does not affect large numbers of people across the country, it does affect a few. It sends a message to the provinces, as the member has suggested, which do indeed control the minimum wage for the most part, that the minimum wage actually should go up to a livable level, a level that would allow people who are working full time to actually make ends meet and take care of themselves and their families.

•(1020)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by congratulating the honourable member for Sault Ste. Marie on his analysis and the speech he made this morning. I see him as a person who is always striving to improve the lot of the most vulnerable members of our society. That is commendable. We completely agree with his analysis.

That said, I do have certain reservations with respect to his approach to solving the problem. He himself said in his speech that the Canadian government failed to fulfill its responsibility to young people—children—despite its commitments to fight poverty. It also failed to come through on social housing and employment insurance.

These are all measures that, if they are not implemented or if they are inadequately implemented, make people poorer. It is not just about minimum wage. We have reservations about this approach, because it is a national strategy that attempts to influence the provinces, including Quebec. It seems to me that many of the responsibilities our colleague identified should now fall under the jurisdiction of the provinces because Canada—the federal government—has shown that it is incompetent, regardless of which major party is in power.

Would it not make more sense for the motion to include this approach: that the resources currently held by the federal government be transferred to the provinces so they can take on the responsibility that Canada is shirking?

Business of Supply

[English]

Mr. Tony Martin: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his kind remarks and also compliment him on the work that we do together at the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities to help those most at risk and marginalized in our country.

I agree with him that the federal government has failed. Not only has it failed by what it has not done, but it has also failed in what it has actually done. It has failed, for example, by getting rid of the Canada assistance plan, which was a framework within which we were actually holding the provinces accountable in terms of the money that we transferred and then would be spent on social assistance, housing, education and health care.

However, I suggest to him that I was very careful in the motion to say that we would do it in cooperation with the provinces, that we would work with the provinces, because we know that a lot of this is in fact in their jurisdiction. We need to challenge them, we need to be flowing enough money for them to actually get the job done, and we need to hold them accountable.

There are some really wonderful things happening across the country in provinces such as Quebec, and now in Newfoundland and Labrador, which has brought in a poverty reduction strategy. We need to get that happening at the national level so more people can benefit.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased today to second the motion by my colleague from Sault Ste. Marie. He has very eloquently described the terribly desperate situation that so many Canadians across the country find themselves in. Many of us have read the statistics, often published in the newspapers, about how almost five million Canadians are living in poverty, 1.2 million children are living in poverty, and one in seven full time workers is working for less than \$10 an hour.

As my colleague described, the real impact is on the day to day lives of so many Canadians. I see it in my riding of Parkdale—High Park. I see it in the community kitchens, the breakfast programs and the Sunday dinner programs, where so many people are so desperate and so grateful for the smallest of generosity from their communities. What hits especially hard is to see the children with their parents. I wonder what kind of hopes and dreams those kids have when they live in such desperate circumstances.

We live in a time when our economy is doing very well. Our corporations are earning profits at an all time high. Our CEOs are earning wildly extravagant wages. A report came out first thing at the beginning of 2007 and stated that the average CEO of one of the major companies has earned, by 9:45 in the morning on new year's day, the equivalent of the annual salary of a person working at minimum wage. That gives us some comparison and an idea of the extremes and the growing gap in our society. We clearly have a lot of money in our society. The issue that we are struggling with, I think, is the equitable distribution of this money so that we do not have such extremes of wealth and poverty.

I have a private member's bill on the issue of reinstating the federal minimum wage at \$10 an hour. We know that most low wage workers are women. Many of them are newcomers to Canada. I see

that in my community because it is one where many people settle when they first arrive in Canada.

Average minimum wages across Canada have declined in their real value by about 20% since 1976. Over the last 30 years, the value of our average minimum wage across the country has declined by 20%. I think that has contributed enormously to the problems of hopelessness and desperation for people living in poverty.

For a government that places such a high priority on a law and order agenda, one of the best ways to prevent crime is to pay people a decent income so they do not feel that desperation and hopelessness, so they do not feel that nothing matters and they have nothing to lose.

We used to have a federal minimum wage. It had not been increased since 1986 and was abolished by the Chrétien government in 1996. We now have no federal minimum wage. I believe that the federal government has really abandoned its leadership role in setting a standard for a minimum wage for Canadians.

Only about 10% of workers in Canada fall under the federal minimum wage. Most workers in the country fall under provincial legislation, but the federal government has the ability to set a standard, to set a goal for the rest of the country, and certainly having a federal minimum wage is very important for people who work under the federal jurisdiction.

There are those who ask, "What about the economy?" People say that doing this will be terrible for the economy. They say that whether something is done federally or the provinces take up the issue of the minimum wage it will have a negative impact on the economy.

• (1025)

I challenge that notion. There is a report by 80 economists in Ontario that states the contrary. Rather than undermining jobs or undermining the economy it states that increasing the minimum wage has a positive impact. It increases labour market participation. More people are able to spend money, unlike the very wealthy who when they get fabulous salaries can salt them away in a trust in the Bahamas or some place. Low income people spend what they get and if they get an increase in pay it goes for food on the table, it goes to rent, it goes to their kids' clothes and school books. It also means that people are paying more in taxes and we have less in social spending, so there is a positive impact all around.

We know that in places where there has been a significant increase in the minimum wage in cities like San Francisco, Washington, and in the U.K., there was a positive impact, not a negative impact, on the economy.

Business of Supply

Some people say this is going to be detrimental to small business. Again, most small businesses fall under provincial jurisdiction, but only about 29% of low wage jobs are in the small business sector. There are many small business owners who pay decent wages because they know they get what they pay for. They want people who are going to be loyal. When they train them, they are going to stay there. They are going to be good with the customers. They believe it is an investment that pays off in the long run. Those who overwhelmingly are paying low wages are the major businesses in fast foods, the retail giants and the temporary agencies. These are the ones that overwhelmingly are keeping low wages in their workplaces.

There is a federal study that did not receive a lot of attention when it was released, but on October 30 there was a study by Harry Arthurs, the former dean of Osgoode Law School, called "Fairness at Work: Federal Labour Standards for the 21st Century" which was reporting on part III of the Labour Code. He made the point that no one should work full time all year and have to live in poverty. That is fundamental and it is a study that the government should heed.

I believe that this is a challenge we can meet. So many Canadians are disaffected by politics. They disengage from the political process because they do not believe their politicians are speaking out for them. If we want to show people that truly we are listening to those who today feel they have no voice, then I believe this is an issue whose time has come. The federal government can show leadership by reinstating the minimum wage as part of an overall national anti-poverty strategy.

My caucus and I are not alone on this. There are many organizations which have been campaigning on this issue. Campaign 2000, most notably, took up the challenge from the motion that this House passed unanimously in 1989 introduced by my colleague, Ed Broadbent, who said that by the year 2000 we should eliminate child poverty, and of course the opposite happened. More children are living in poverty.

Campaign 2000 believes in this as do the National Anti-Poverty Organization, the Canadian Federation of Students, the Canadian Labour Congress, Make Poverty History, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the *Toronto Star*, the Community Social Planning Council, and KAIROS, which is an interfaith organization. Many thousands of Canadians all believe as well that working men and women deserve a fair day's pay for a fair day's work.

I want to close with a quote from Dr. Charles Hastings. He was Toronto's first medical officer of health. Almost 100 years ago, in 1918, he wrote the following:

Every nation that permits people to remain under the fetters of preventable disease and permits social conditions to exist that make it impossible for them to be properly fed, clothed and housed so as to maintain a high degree of resistance and physical fitness; and, who endorses a wage that does not afford sufficient revenue for the home, a revenue that will make possible the development of a sound mind and body, is trampling on a primary principle of democracy.

• (1030)

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if we take a look at who would be covered by this motion, we are talking about people who would be making a \$10 an hour minimum wage and who fall under the auspices of the Canada Labour Code. If we take a look at the facts, that is only about 700,000 people across Canada, of

which about 50% are actually covered by collective bargaining agreements. I do not know of anybody in those collective bargaining agreements who are paid less than \$10 an hour.

In other industry sectors, such as interprovincial companies, rail companies, transportation and telecommunications, I do not know of anybody in those industries who is making less than \$10 an hour. Maybe the member could enlighten me on that.

From the banking perspective, the banking industry would also be covered under the Canada Labour Code and I do not know of anybody in the banking industry who is making less than \$10 an hour.

It seems to me that the only people who would really be affected by this are people on first nations reserves or people in the territories. We have economic development going on in a lot of first nations reserves, where these small companies are starting up and they are trying to pay employees. If we are going to suddenly raise the minimum wage limit far beyond what is currently accepted in a lot of provinces, does the member not think that would shut down a lot of these businesses and actually exacerbate the problem of poverty?

• (1035)

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member says that there are about 700,000 workers who would be covered by this legislation. That says to me that there are 700,000 individuals with families who deserve the basic standard of a decent minimum wage.

As I said earlier, about 10% of the workforce falls under federal jurisdiction. He is right, many of these workers are covered by collective agreements. However, certainly, there are some people who fall below the federal minimum wage.

We cannot have it both ways. We cannot say that it is not doable and, on the other hand, say that nobody is going to be affected.

I believe that, in fact, it is absolutely achievable and that while the numbers are not astronomical of those who work below \$10 a hour, certainly there will be people who will be helped by this. I think our federal government should show leadership on this issue and lead the way and, hopefully, many of the provinces will follow.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member, during her speech, said people should not be living in poverty. However, she must concede that one of the problems we have in Canada is that we have not established real poverty lines. We do not know what they are. The low income cutoff is one chart that treats every province, every region and every community identically, which is really not reflective of the economic reality.

I wonder if the member would agree that part of a national strategy should be in fact to establish what level of poverty we are prepared to tolerate in Canada and to establish that level province to province and community to community, so that Canadians understand what value we place on the contribution of all who want to work and contribute to Canada.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, the low income cutoff is one measure that, today, is generally accepted as a measure of determining poverty levels.

Business of Supply

I am always concerned when people want to study definitions, and I am sure this is not what the hon. member means by this, but there is always the danger that then there is a delay in actually taking action because there is a delay in establishing a definition.

I think we see the definition by the numbers of people in all our communities who, by anyone's measure, are living in poverty. Certainly, in Mr. Arthurs' report on part III of the Labour Code, he referred to the low income cutoff level. That was a standard that he took.

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am intrigued by the question that was asked from the opposite side with respect to the negative impact that this approach, suggested by my colleague in terms of the minimum wage, would have on small business.

I would like to ask the member, if that premise were true, and I would dispute it, what about taking the approach that would more broadly tax large corporations and then applying that to a national income supplement to those who have very low disposable income?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, I do not buy the argument that we cannot afford to pay \$10 an hour. As I said, the majority of low wage jobs are with large employers, most of whom are extremely profitable. In fact, profits have never been higher. In small businesses, it is not like one small business will be disadvantaged versus another, it will be the same floor for everyone.

I believe it is a question of basic respect for people. We cannot have a minimum wage today worth 20% less than it was 30 years ago, and believe that somehow we live in a fair and democratic society.

• (1040)

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for bringing forward the motion today. I know the hon. member has a lot of interest and concern for this issue.

I would also like to remind everyone who is watching this debate that we all care very much. This is an issue that crosses all party lines. I think every member in the House, all 308 of us care very much. It does not matter which party we represent. We care and we are trying to address this very important issue. Therefore, I am hoping that out of these debates we can come to some solutions.

Some good questions have already been asked about trying to establish a poverty line. We look forward to a lot of good speeches and good questions today which will, hopefully, lead to some solutions.

I am taking this opportunity to address some of the many measures that the government is taking to promote the economic well-being of Canadians.

The Conservative Party members share the hon. member's dedication to helping eliminate poverty in Canada. We believe that to do this the government must invest in the financial security of Canada and its citizens. The government is doing that.

The measures the government has introduced are designed to promote today's economy and build a prosperous tomorrow for the benefit of all Canadians.

Before examining these measures, let us take a brief look at Canada's economy as a whole and the state of its labour market.

The economy is booming and with that comes higher employment rates. According to the latest Statistics Canada labour force survey, employment rose by an estimated 22,000 in April and is up almost 1% this year, or double the pace of growth observed over the first four months of last year.

Unemployment is hovering at a 30 year low. More Canadians than ever are at work. This translates into greater employment opportunities across the country, and I know of no greater anti-poverty measure than a job.

The government recognizes, though, that not everyone is equipped to participate in this booming economy, and that is why our new government has made a number of investments that recognize the importance of supporting skills development.

The government recognizes the importance of learning, from apprenticeship to post-secondary education, from academic infrastructure to research and development, from child care to youth programs, and to programs for older workers and new Canadians. These are measures that will help to ensure Canadians keep up with the ever growing knowledge economy, the best means of securing a well paying job.

The government also recognizes, however, that there are vulnerable members of society that do need additional support. Even in times of prosperity there are those who need temporary financial assistance when they are between jobs and employment insurance is there for them.

Employment insurance also offers support to workers who must be absent from work owing to sickness or caring for a gravely ill relative. Maternity and parental benefits are available for parents to take an absence from work for up to a year to care for their newborn child.

I was remiss, Mr. Speaker. I forgot to mention that I will be sharing my time with the member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont.

I would like to go and speak about older workers. As I said, in times of prosperity there are those who do need temporary financial assistance. Again, the government is addressing this with older workers. In the work world, older workers are often the most vulnerable. This is why the government is taking action through the employment insurance program to provide a total of \$1.4 billion to support some 230,000 unemployed older workers annually.

Business of Supply

•(1045)

In employment programs funded through EI part II, more than 80,000 unemployed workers age 50 and over were helped to obtain and maintain employment through training, work experience and aid in starting a new business. This figure represents 12% of all workers assisted by these programs. These are tangible supports, supports for older workers who want to stay active and who want to be contributing members of the workforce.

We continue to examine ways to assist older workers. We are undertaking a targeted older workers strategy to help older workers with training. Changes in the global economy can affect us here at home and we understand that. The need is to be ready for this.

The shame of the last decade was that the Liberals did nothing for the older workers but talk about studying a problem everyone knew was coming. It is telling that the Liberal member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor recently came out against older worker programs and the Liberal leader has said nothing about it.

Turning to foreign credentials recognition for workers new to Canada, too often newcomers to Canada have difficulty finding employment especially in their field of expertise. Canada's new government is working on the foreign credentials recognition process to speed up their ability to integrate into the labour market and society.

While the Liberals talked about the issue and the NDP holds press conferences, the new government is acting. To give just one example, the British Columbia Institute of Technology, Campus Canada and United Chinese Community Enrichment Services Society will receive funding to forge the partnerships necessary to deliver overseas information services, assessment services, skills upgrading, Canadian workplace experience opportunities and enhanced settlement support to skilled immigrants. This support will be offered both prior to and upon arrival in Canada. Projects such as these help not only to combat poverty among immigrants but they also help all Canadians to benefit and all Canadians to prosper from their expertise.

The NDP's motion does not address immigrants, but the Conservatives know that immigrants were falling behind. It took real leadership by the Prime Minister and the government to see the problem and to act on it.

We have reduced in half the right of permanent residence fees that the Liberals had imposed on the newcomers. We have ended the decade long freeze the Liberals imposed on funding to community based agencies that help newcomers adapt and integrate into Canada.

The NDP and the Liberals were against immigration measures in our budget but Canadians and immigrants were not. They know that the Conservatives not only support immigration but we want to give immigrants the tools they need to succeed and take full part in Canada's prosperity.

The new government is also taking action to ensure that seniors can enjoy their retirement in financial security. The new government listens to seniors. They support us.

The fact is the NDP's motion misstates the success Canada has been making for seniors. Over the past 25 years poverty has been

going down for seniors in Canada and the percentage of seniors living below Statistics Canada's low income cutoff has gone from 21.3% in 1980 to 5.6% in 2004, an all-time low. The trend is due in large part to our income security programs, the old age security program and the Canada pension plan.

We have introduced a bill to amend those programs to simplify access to and delivery of benefits. One of the amendments would enable Canadians who file tax returns to apply for the guaranteed income supplement only once. After their initial application their annual tax filings would largely determine whether or not they received the guaranteed income supplement from year to year. They would never need to reapply. We are also continuing our extensive efforts to reach out to those seniors who may be eligible for the guaranteed income supplement but who do not file tax returns.

We have been working with the homeless. We have been working with the provinces and territories on how best to address the needs of particular regions and communities. More important, we have been working with them on building more affordable housing.

Finally, we realize that worker-management relations and workplace conditions are critical to productivity and successful functioning of private and public sector organizations. They are equally important to the personal and family lives of a vast number of individuals who go to work every day.

•(1050)

We are committed to supporting vulnerable Canadians and all Canadians in achieving economic security. The measures I have outlined are only a few examples. I believe our approach is the right one. The evidence of our economy backs this up. Therefore, as much as I appreciate the hon. member's sentiments, I cannot support the motion.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the comments made by the member. One would think that with all the glowing accomplishments by the government that it would be supporting a national strategy to fight poverty in our country. The real problem is that she was just speaking about dealing with the symptoms, not with the root causes that we are confronting here in our country every single day.

The parliamentary secretary talked about older worker adjustment. What she failed to address is the policies of her government that have made these kinds of programs more and more necessary.

This country's manufacturing sector is in decline. Where is the auto strategy? Where is the steel sector strategy? What about the softwood sellout that has decimated our forestry sector? That is why we are talking about older worker adjustment. Those policies were put in place by the Conservative government.

Business of Supply

The parliamentary secretary also talked about immigrants, the problems they face and the often higher rates of poverty that are confronting immigrants in our country. Of course, she is absolutely right about that, but the reason for that is that the government actually goes abroad advertising decent jobs for newcomers right here in Canada. It makes a comprehensive false advertising campaign luring people over here and when they get here they cannot get accredited. That is why immigrants are facing higher rates of poverty.

The government is not dealing with the root causes of the issues that she speaks about.

There is hypocrisy in terms of what is happening for seniors in the country. I have spoken a number of times on the issue of the consumer price index and the miscalculated rate of inflation. Seniors have been shortchanged by the government for the last five years. Clearly, seniors are not benefiting from the policies of the government.

I wonder if the member could read our motion again, look at the absolute need in the country for a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy and not just recognize that it is not good enough just to deal with the symptoms but rather that we need to get to the root causes of poverty in our country. I would urge her and her caucus to get behind the NDP motion.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for inviting me to join her in her goals. That is what I have spoken about. I would say that I have answered all of her questions through actions, not just through talking and press conferences. As I said earlier, we walk the walk.

We are working on recognizing foreign credentials so that indeed the immigrants who come to this country can in fact practise in the profession they had succeeded in in the country from which they came. We are working on foreign credentials recognition, but we have to have the cooperation of the provinces and the professionals to make sure that the credentials are indeed recognized correctly. Foreign credentials recognition is well in place.

We introduced Bill C-36 for the seniors and I hope that the member will encourage everyone to fast track this bill so that this will not be another burden for the seniors who soon will be trying to access the guaranteed income supplement to top off their low incomes.

Those are just two immediate goals, but I could perhaps refer to our child care initiative which I think really helps—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not think the member could go on because there is another question to be asked by the hon. member for Mississauga South.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the wildebeest is a dumb animal, and when I hear members talk about the new government I am pretty sure that new is spelled g-n-u.

The member has spent all her time totally ignoring the elements of the motion before the House. We are talking about a national strategy to alleviate poverty. The member has no idea of what the motion is about. She did not talk about the implications of mental illness, about spousal abuse, about aboriginals off reserve and their challenges in the aboriginal communities, and about youth alienated from their

families. She just talked about people who have jobs and maybe have to get EI benefits or people who have finished their careers and need to get some social assistance.

When will the gnu government get it and get on side with poverty alleviation?

• (1055)

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Speaker, I do not think I should have to answer that question.

We are acting. We are not just talking. We are walking the walk with some of the policies we have implemented and some of the things we have done most recently. We have made announcements on—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The parliamentary secretary does not have long to answer because the time has expired.

Resuming debate with the hon. member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont.

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the outset I want to say that I have the pleasure of serving on the human resources committee with the member for Sault Ste. Marie and I appreciate his contribution in this area. However, I need to point out that the concern for the welfare of low income Canadians is not restricted to card carrying members of the New Democratic Party.

Since taking office, Canada's new government has taken significant steps to help low income Canadians. However, unlike the NDP, we believe that the most effective way to help low income families is through vibrant and sustained economic growth. This represents a fundamental truth that even the official opposition Liberal Party would concur with, or did when it was in government.

The former Liberal parliamentary secretary to the minister of human resources and social development, Eleni Bakopanos, once noted, "The best economic and social program is job creation". The former Liberal minister of human resources, the member for Eglinton—Lawrence, stated, "In my opinion, the best employment insurance is a job, employment".

Furthermore, we understand that the best way to spur economic growth is through the cutting of excessive taxes and unnecessary regulations that suffocate the innovation and entrepreneurship needed for a strong economy.

I am happy to report that Canada's new government has accomplished a great deal in pursuit of these objectives. Within the first 100 days of taking office, we moved swiftly to help create the right conditions and opportunities for all Canadians to succeed.

In budget 2006 we moved to deliver more tax relief for individuals than the last four federal budgets combined. We reduced the GST by one percentage point. This is a tax reduction for all Canadians, including those whose incomes are too low to pay any income tax. As the newly minted Liberal member for Halton remarked, "families who make less money benefit more than wealthier ones from the GST cut".

Business of Supply

Budget 2006 also permanently reduced the lowest personal income tax rate from its previously legislated rate of 16% to 15.5%. Moreover, we increased the basic personal exemption amount, which will reach at least \$10,000 by 2009, and we introduced the new Canada employment credit. Taken together, these measures will increase the amount of income that can be earned without paying income tax to almost \$10,000 in 2007 and over \$11,000 in 2009. Indeed, as a result of such measures in the 2006 budget, about 655,000 low income Canadians will be removed from the tax rolls altogether.

While these important measures may not seem significant to the members opposite, they have improved the lives of hard-working families, putting a little extra money in their pockets or allowing parents to give their kids a little extra money for what they need. But again, the notion of letting Canadians keep more of their hard-earned paycheque may seem foreign to an increasingly out of touch NDP.

Not content to stop there, we have also committed to further tax relief by reducing the GST by another percentage point.

Budget 2006 also addressed the needs of Canada's seniors by doubling the maximum amount of tax free pension income that can be claimed under the pension income credit to \$2,000. This measure, effective for the 2006 and subsequent taxation years, will benefit nearly three million taxpayers receiving eligible pension income. What is more, it will remove approximately 85,000 pensioners from the tax rolls.

Likewise, the tax fairness plan announced last October went even further for Canada's seniors. We proposed to increase the age credit amount by \$1,000 and introduced income splitting for pensions to increase the rewards from retirement savings. Such measures will result in substantial savings for our seniors. As Canada's Association for the Fifty-Plus noted, "the new measures should play to the advantage of a significant number of pensioners in Canada".

We and, more importantly, seniors from coast to coast look forward to the support of the opposition as we table legislation for these measures in the near future. As Dan Braniff of the Common Front for Pension Splitting recently declared:

We have not let up in our struggle... We're writing letters to the opposition to let them know that seniors are counting on the pension-splitting.

I plead with the member for Sault Ste. Marie and his opposition colleagues not to turn their backs on seniors and to support Canada's new government.

While we have redoubled our efforts at helping our seniors, we have done so while simultaneously recognizing that one of the most important investments we can make is to support families as they raise their children, the next generation of Canadians. That is why budget 2006 provided the kind of investments that will make a real difference to parents by providing more choice in child care for families with young children.

The universal child care benefit introduced in last year's budget provides all families with \$100 per month for each child under the age of six. In addition to this benefit, income support is also provided to families with children through the two main components of the Canada child tax benefit: the base benefit, which is targeted to low and middle income families; and the national child benefit

supplement, which provides additional assistance to low income families.

● (1100)

With the introduction of the universal child care benefit in budget 2006, total direct federal support to families will be almost \$12 billion in 2007. The universal child care benefit helps all families, including those who are new to our country. The government also helped new Canadians by cutting the rate of permanent residence fee in half, reducing the economic burden the Liberals imposed on those who tried to establish a new life in Canada.

Unfortunately, the NDP wants to take some of these benefits away. Both the NDP member for Sault Ste. Marie and the NDP member for Trinity—Spadina attempted to bring forward motions at committee that would have gutted the operational funding for the universal child care benefit, preventing Canadian parents from getting support. Luckily for Canadian families, the new Conservative government will not allow that to happen.

Our government will also not turn a deaf ear to the plight of our fellow Canadians in our aboriginal communities and we will not comfort these Canadians with the false hope of empty promises. Indeed, Canada's new government recognizes that our first nations people face unique challenges and we are committed to support these communities as they address these needs.

With that goal in mind, budget 2006 provided \$450 million to take action in areas such as ensuring a safe water supply, providing adequate housing on reserves and improving education outcomes and socio-economic conditions for aboriginal women, children and families. In addition, the budget confirmed up to \$300 million to provinces to address immediate pressures in off reserve aboriginal housing. These initiatives represent concrete action, not vacant promises.

Budget 2006 and our tax fairness plan took significant steps to get Canada back on track and created the advantages that would in turn create the prosperity, which would lift all Canadians. I am pleased to report that the state of the Canadian labour market under this Conservative government is strong and robust. Our unemployment rate is at its lowest level in nearly 32 years, but we need to go further. We need to build an economy that will help produce better jobs for even more Canadians over the coming years.

That is why the Minister of Finance introduced "Advantage Canada", a bold new economic plan for Canada. A key component of this plan is our promise to deliver a working income tax benefit in budget 2007 to help low and modest income Canadians get ahead. I will take a moment to expand on this important initiative.

Business of Supply

For too many low income Canadians, working can mean being financially worse off. For example, a typical single parent, with one child, who takes a low income job could lose almost 80¢ of each dollar earned to taxes and reduced income from government programs. In addition, he or she could also lose in kind benefits, such as subsidized housing and prescription drugs, and could often take on work related expenses as well. Some people refer to this situation as the welfare wall, a situation that discourages many low and modest income Canadians from getting the jobs they and their families need to have.

This benefit would increase income support while at the same time strengthen work incentives. With labour shortages emerging throughout the country and an aging population, action to improve work incentives for low and modest income Canadians must be an imperative for all governments.

Today's motion calls for the government to address the issues facing low income Canadians. That is exactly what Canada's new government is doing. We made it a priority in our inaugural budget by providing much needed assistance to low income Canadians and the Conservative government will continue to build on that action.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed at the number of shots the member took at our party. We brought this motion forward in a non-partisan way in the hope that the House would find in its political will the leadership to begin tackling the terrible reality of poverty in many of our communities. I spoke to his minister about this when I met with him last Thursday. I also met with the member for York Centre. We had a chat about poverty and perhaps an anti-poverty strategy flowing out of this place.

Today's motion was presented in a non-partisan way to see if we could find common will. People, particularly those marginalized and at risk, expect us to take some action. The member's suggestion that somehow a good economy lifts all hopes just does not play out.

Calgary has a terrible homelessness situation. Over 3,500 people are living on the streets at night or are in shelters. I visited those shelters. Has the member taken the time to visit those shelters and meet with the people to find out just exactly why this has happened? Has he seen what is going on? What answer might he have for them in terms of some relief?

• (1105)

Mr. Mike Lake: Mr. Speaker, first, I do not see myself as having taken shots at his party. I was simply articulating the difference in views we may have in how to accomplish some of the things we might agree need to be accomplished in our country after 13 years with the previous Liberal government. We heard a lot of talk about a lot of different things, but there was no action to follow. When action was taken, such as cutting \$25 billion in transfer payments, the other side did not talk about it too often.

As I mentioned, we agree on the fact that we need to do something to eradicate poverty. We all agree on the fact that people with disabilities need to have opportunities to work in areas of their skill sets. We talk about this in our committee all the time. We agree on a great many things in terms of goals for the country. Where we disagree is how to accomplish those. That was what I was trying to

articulate in my speech. I apologize if it was taken as a slight against you personally. I was not trying to do that.

We are trying to clearly articulate the difference between just simply words and the action that our government has taken on a variety of fronts, which are addressed in your motion.

The Deputy Speaker: Before I go to the next question, I find the second person emerging in the debate. We should be referring to he, him, his, her and whatnot, not you and yours.

The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, once again, a Conservative member is talking about economic growth as if it were a panacea, an answer to all our problems, but he is unfortunately completely ignoring the reality that is poverty. Once again, as the parliamentary secretary did, the hon. member is listing all the so-called good things the Conservative government has done.

I would like the member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont to tell us about the other measures, the negative measures the Conservative government has taken, such as not using the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation surplus, the draconian cuts that are hurting women's groups and aboriginal peoples, whom the government has undervalued.

Can the member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont tell us why he dismissed the notion of poverty and spoke only about economics?

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Lake: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member took a shot at the fact that we would suggest economic growth could help eradicate poverty to some extent. I do not really understand the notion that would be the opposite of this.

Economic growth produces opportunity for people. I believe a large number of people living poverty are looking for opportunity. We are talking about creating opportunities for people to get out of the situations in which they find themselves, people who are looking for that hope, looking for that chance to get out.

In our current climate, there are jobs out there and people are finding themselves making a better life for themselves because of some of the things we have done, such as not having to spend so much money on tax, with the cut to the GST. We also have other programs for seniors, for students, such as the transit tax, and for those who find themselves in low income situations. I do not understand the opposition to economic growth as articulated by the other parties.

• (1110)

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Brampton—Springdale.

Business of Supply

As Canadians, we expect certain things of and for ourselves. We expect certain things of and for others. We know that historically, living in a climate that was harsh and unpredictable in a land that could be inhospitable and demanding, we could not make it on our own. We needed our neighbours and our neighbours needed us. We still do.

We also know that economic policy and social policy are really part of the same thing. A strong economy is our best instrument of social policy. It not only generates more money that can go into social programs, it means more people are able to support themselves without the assistance of social programs, leaving more for people who cannot. Economic policy and social policy need each other.

We usually think of social programs as safety nets, as something passive, but in a trapeze act in a circus, a safety net encourages people to try what they cannot be certain of doing, to fall into the net when they fail, then to get back up and try again, to learn, to improve, to become good at something. A safety net is not passive. It is an improver, an enabler, an instrument that encourages bigger and bigger ambitions. It allows us to take risks. It makes us better.

As Canadians, we think of ourselves as a country of inclusion, where differences are both celebrated and considered not to be significant and where the less fortunate are given a chance. We have done well, but we must do better.

When kids see something that is unjust, not having lived long lives of explanation and excuse, they say that it is not fair. No amount of explanation or excuse will diminish their sense of outrage. It is in this spirit that we look to implement a national anti-poverty strategy.

To do so, we need to set targets and the target is not eradication. Eradication means zero. We will not get to zero. Nobody has ever got to zero, no country has ever got to zero. When we set a target that we cannot achieve, we set ourselves up for a feeling of failure, for the criticism of failure, to an absence of energy that comes with failure, and we need all the energy we can get.

To set targets, we need to agree on a common definition, one that the public accepts and believes is a fair representation of poverty. Currently we have three or four definitions, ones that all of us use selectively to benefit ourselves and to disadvantage others when the time seems right to us, and they are definitions that the public does not necessarily accept or believe as true representation of poverty.

I think we are at a point now where we are ready to find that common definition and with that common definition, a target. Then we need to go after hitting this target in a whole lot of different ways, supporting, giving a boost to those in greatest need, single mothers, people with disabilities, new immigrants, seniors, children and aboriginals.

In terms of studying that kind of specific target, in our last leadership campaign I proposed, as a target to reduce child poverty, 25% over the next five years, 50% over the next ten years. They are difficult targets, but they are achievable by supporting and giving a boost to those in greatest need, by enhancing the Canada child tax benefit, recreating a real system of early learning and child care

across the country, re-implementing the Kelowna accord and making life for Canadians with disabilities truly accessible and inclusive.

●(1115)

Increasing the minimum wage, as the motion proposes, can only help but it is a very limited instrument. The motion applies only to workers in federally regulated sectors, such as banking, telecommunications and railways, which make up only about 5% of Canada's workforce and, of this 5%, only 2% make less than \$10 an hour. The motion would affect only one-tenth of 1% of Canada's workforce.

Indeed, something is disingenuous about this motion brought forward by the NDP. In the time of the last government we were absolutely on our way to a national system of early learning and child care. The stakeholders knew it, the public knew it and the parents knew it. We were on our way with the Kelowna accord. The public knew it and the aboriginal peoples knew it. Then the NDP helped to bring the government down and with it child care and Kelowna, critical elements in the fight against poverty gone, gone until the government is gone. The NDP can bring forward 100 or 1,000 motions like this and none can hide this fact and none will get the NDP off the hook.

We, the Canadian people, have a problem. To have a real national anti-poverty strategy, we need to believe in it. It is the same with climate change, with aboriginal issues and with child care. It is hard. It will take a long time. It requires the deep in the bones belief that politics is about people. It is for people. When things go wrong in a person's life, as anyone else would do, governments need to pitch in and do what it takes, not look for any and every way to get out, not play the jurisdictional blame game and not play the ideological card. This is hard. There will be moments of disappointment and frustration.

Real results on poverty will only happen if the government of the day truly believes in the fight of it, if the Prime Minister believes that the real purpose of politics is not politics, if the Prime Minister is a real believer and if the prime minister is a real leader.

How do we get it done? The problem is there is no "it" in it, just stuff. No pretending, no wishful thinking and no desperate hope that decisiveness is real leadership and not just style because it is not.

I support the motion but, make no mistake, nothing will happen in the fight against poverty until the current government is gone.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments by the member who just spoke and his indication that his party will support this motion. However, I must say, very sincerely, that I was disappointed in his tone and his tack here.

Business of Supply

I came to the House this morning hoping that we could build some momentum, a common cause that would send a message to thousands of people across the country who are listening and waiting for government, all of us here, Liberals, Conservatives, New Democrats and the Bloc, to actually do something that will relieve some of the pressure they are feeling, give them some hope and present to them a vision of the country.

I hope the member can get out of the place where he is still angry about the last election because it was in fact the Canadian people who put the Liberals in the penalty box. Obviously you did not get that message and until you do I do not think you will be given the responsibility of leadership in this country.

● (1120)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I did say a little earlier that I encourage people not to use the second person, not to refer to other members as you, or their attributes as your attributes but as him or as her. I would caution the hon. member to please try to respect that rule of the House.

Mr. Tony Martin: My apologies, Mr. Speaker, I was a little emotional there.

Given that Canada has not had an affordable housing program for 15 years, what concrete suggestion is the member willing to give today that we can all get our energies around and give leadership on so we can give some hope and some vision to the people out there, particularly those most at risk and marginalized?

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member talks about a common cause. The problem with a common cause is that it needs to be common. The actions of the present government over the last 13 months are not of common cause to this. They are quite contrary to the kind of fight that is required to significantly reduce poverty.

The hon. member heard the expressions from the government this morning. There was no suggestion of common cause whatsoever. It needs to be stated that all kinds of descriptions of what we have done in the last while do not add up to anything that will make any kind of significant difference in terms of poverty. That needs to be heard and it needs to be understood.

We need to set targets because when we do we are not only focused on what it is we are doing, we also focus on what we have not yet achieved. We need to see what we have not yet achieved in order to know what more we need to do.

All of the discussion over there has to do with what has already been done, almost all of which was done during the time of the last government, and nothing approaches anything in this regard.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, everyone in this House is concerned about poverty and everyone wants to see it as something that becomes history and not something that is part of so many Canadians' daily lives.

I appreciate the motion being brought forward by the member for Sault Ste. Marie and his compassion and his passion on this issue but I do have a concern about the motion.

I come from a rural area in Canada and mandating the \$10 per hour minimum wage would be extremely difficult for a lot of my small businesses and farms. The hon. member said that he wants to

talk about the future in implementing the program. If we were to go ahead with a \$10 minimum wage that would put a lot of our small businesses in rural Canada under the table or essentially take them off the map, creating more unemployment. How would we address that situation?

We need to be concerned that in every area of Canada one size does not fit all.

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Speaker, most of the hon. member's examples are ones that would not apply under this motion. Most of them are under provincial jurisdiction. One example was in terms of small businesses and farmers and those would apply under provincial jurisdiction as opposed to federal.

As I said earlier, this is a motion where the specific example of the minimum wage is only a small piece in that total approach that is required if we are going to make a real difference in terms of poverty.

We can nibble away at the edges with lots of different programs but nibbling away is not what Canadians expect of us or expect of each other. We need a real strategy, a real approach and that requires real targets and, again, seeing what we are not doing and not just focusing on what it is we are.

● (1125)

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as Canadians watch this debate on television, they are looking to us as parliamentarians to give them a sense of hope. They are looking to us as parliamentarians to give them a chance and an opportunity to live their dreams. They are looking to us as parliamentarians to ensure they have the tools and the resources they need to get out of poverty.

Canadians want a government and they want politicians who do not have a "me" approach but practise a "we" approach so that, together, as Canadians, we can continue to be the envy of the world.

It is unfortunate that since being elected the Conservative government has betrayed and ignored the voices of many Canadian families and the most vulnerable in our society. With its ideological, right wing approach, the Conservatives have single-handedly created a situation that will contribute to the rise of poverty in our country.

In my own riding of Brampton—Springdale, I have heard from women, seniors, children, people from cultural groups and youth organizations who have been impacted by the cuts that the government has made to important social programs.

The anti-poverty strategy put forward by the NDP is needed because the Conservative minority government has adopted a "fend for yourself" policy in respect to Canadians.

Let us talk about child care. Whether a senior, a youth or family is in need of child care, they need to be one of the lucky ones to benefit from the government's policy. If both parents can afford to stay at home, they will be the lucky ones under the Conservative government. However, like the 70% of children under six years of age whose mothers are working, those parents do not actually luck out under the government's policy because its plan only ensures benefits for those who are well off.

Business of Supply

The neo-Conservative government does not understand the needs of Canadian families. The families who will benefit the least from this so-called universal child care benefit are those who really need it most.

Let us take a look at an example. A couple earning \$40,000 each will lose about one-third of their monthly benefit, winding up with only \$60 a month per child for child care. If we look at the cost of child care, this by no means will help them to ensure their children have the very best start in life.

I would like to compare this to what the former minister of human resources and social development has spent on limousines in the last three days. It was more than \$1,800. This is money that could have been utilized by many Canadian parents and families who are living in poverty.

Child care advocacy groups and Canadian parents and families have issued a report card in this regard giving the Prime Minister and the new Conservative government a failing grade when it comes to delivering programs for children who are living in poverty in this country.

The situation is about to get worse because the funding that was implemented under the former Liberal government, with the early learning and child care initiatives, will run out next month and we will have an additional crisis in this country. We will have an additional crisis because the Conservative government failed to deliver on its promise to create 125,000 spaces. It has created zero of those spaces.

It has also failed Canadians and contributed to poverty by cancelling programs that are impacting the most vulnerable in our society, by cutting funding and ignoring priorities that are important to Canadians. It seems as if the Conservative government is ripping at the seams of our social fabric.

Some of the other Conservative policy initiatives have hit low income Canadians particularly hard. They have increased the bottom income tax rate from 15% to 15.5%. Instead of reducing income taxes for those who need it most, they have actually increased taxes. By lowering the basic personal exemption by \$400, they have put 200,000 low income Canadians back on the tax rolls. They have eliminated the young child supplement to the child tax benefit. They have cancelled the Kelowna accord, which would have addressed poverty among aboriginal Canadians.

• (1130)

Another demographic hit by the Conservative Party's policy is youth. Students who have relied on summer jobs to ensure they can pay for their tuition, and perhaps get out of poverty, are going to suffer under this government, because the Conservatives have cut \$55 million from the summer career placement program.

I spoke about the aboriginal community. Poverty among aboriginals is another significant challenge. Even though during the election campaign the Conservatives promised they would uphold the Government of Canada's commitment to first nations and aboriginal communities, the first thing they did in office was cut the \$5 billion Kelowna accord, an accord that would have invested in children, health care and educational programs for our aboriginal communities.

Not only did the Conservatives cut the Kelowna accord, they have made more budget cuts to programs that are vital to the aboriginal community. They have cut child care funding for first nations, the first nations stop smoking program, and funding for aboriginal languages. It is unfortunate that due to these program cuts the Conservatives have made it very clear to aboriginal Canadians that they are not one of their priorities.

I will read for members a quote from Phil Fontaine, National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, who was left to conclude, "We're the only community that's been targeted this way". He said, "We ask ourselves if this government really does care about the First Nations communities". Now, under the leadership of Phil Fontaine, the Assembly of First Nations has had to launch its own campaign to address the issue of poverty in first nations communities.

We can talk about homelessness. We can talk about the fact that the government has not provided transitional funding to ensure those who are the most vulnerable in our society can get access to funding from SCPI, the supporting communities partnership initiative, to have the resources and tools they need to live in affordable housing.

What is worse is the fact that the government has taken away needed transitional funding when it cancelled the SCPI program. That has resulted in hundreds of shelters and the homeless being left in limbo, with shelters facing the fact that they might have to close and the homeless being left out in the cold due to the Conservative government's new philosophy.

If the government truly valued our nation's social programs, it would have made sure that a transition program for the homeless in this country was in place. Let us take a look at the Conservatives' 2006 platform. I was quite surprised when I took a look at their platform. There is nothing, not one initiative outlined in their election platform, that talks about poverty reduction or the minimum wage.

Let us take a look at the Liberal Party's track record. We are committed to social justice, to ensuring fair justice in terms of income distribution. The policies and the programs established under the Liberal government have ensured that Canada's social safety net is the best in the world. We ensured that by working together with the provinces and territories to make our country even stronger.

That is why we support today's motion for creating a national anti-poverty strategy and for ensuring that as the federal government there is an opportunity to increase the minimum wage to \$10.

In conclusion, I find it slightly hypocritical that the NDP members are actually putting forward this motion, because it is due to their alliance with the Conservatives that the Liberal government was forced to go to an election and was not able to deliver on behalf of children, in ensuring that there were child care spaces, and on behalf of seniors, women and the most vulnerable in this country.

We on this side of the House are committed to a national anti-poverty strategy. We are committed as a party to standing up for the most vulnerable in our society. We are committed to addressing the root causes of poverty in a comprehensive approach, an approach that champions social justice and economic prosperity.

Business of Supply

•(1135)

We have a dynamic team that is passionate, committed and driven to ensure that our approach, the Liberal approach, is one that creates acceptance of tolerance, equality and opportunity, because those are core values that so many Canadians across the country cherish. I am sure that with all parliamentarians working together we will be able to create a national anti-poverty strategy. We must all believe in this in our hearts.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask my colleague what she thinks of the statements made earlier by two Conservative members, including the parliamentary secretary, to the effect that the solution to poverty is a thriving economy.

I respectfully submit that Canada's economy has never been as healthy as it has in the past 20 years. For the past three or four years, our economy has been booming. Our economic performance is so strong that Canada is held up as a model for other nations. Yet the number of homeless people and people using food banks is growing steadily. Two years ago, 885,000 people used food banks in Canada. That is more than the population of Ottawa. Two years ago, 245,000 children under 15 used food banks. Last year, that number rose to 325,000.

If we can fight poverty with economic growth, why is poverty continuing to grow? Something is not right. I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on this. Does she share the Conservatives' opinion?

[English]

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Mr. Speaker, I have had the opportunity to sit with the member on the human resources and social development committee. I know that he is very passionately committed to ensuring that all Canadians, regardless of their socio-economic status, have the best opportunities available to them.

To answer the hon. member's question, I can say that when the Conservatives spoke to the motion, I found it quite ironic that they did not address the motion itself in terms of having a comprehensive approach to dealing with the creation of a national anti-poverty strategy.

I think the hon. member would like me to read for him what was written in 1997 by our Prime Minister at the moment, who hopefully will be the former prime minister:

In terms of the unemployed, of which we have over a million-and-a-half, don't feel particularly bad for many of these people. They don't feel bad about it themselves, as long as they're receiving generous social assistance and unemployment insurance.

That was written by the Prime Minister in a speech for the Council for National Policy in 1997.

We also can take a look at some other quotes from what he has written. Again in 1997, he said:

Canada is a Northern European welfare state in the worst sense of the term, and very proud of it.

Is this a Prime Minister and a government that really believe in the most vulnerable of our society? We have seen this at first hand since

the Conservatives have been elected in all the cuts they have made to important social programs in this country.

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the chance to address some of the issues the member has raised.

The member mentions 1997. It is interesting that she would quote the current Prime Minister from that year, because that was the very year, of course, in which the previous Liberal government was cutting \$25 billion out of social programs: money for people who were without homes, money for people who were seeking to go to university, money for people who were trying to get health care, money for the elderly, and money for the disabled.

They were the deepest cuts in Canada's social safety net in the history of the country, so it is ironic that the member would stand up and be outraged at the prospect that the government is not supporting a national anti-poverty strategy when in fact, apparently, the previous Liberal government had a strategy to create poverty and succeeded in doing that to a great degree.

I do not expect the member to agree with this, but I wonder if the member would acknowledge for a moment that her government, the Liberal Party, made the deepest cuts ever in Canadian history to Canada's social safety net, and in doing that really revealed its true stripes when it comes to dealing with the poor, the homeless and the people who need help.

•(1140)

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Mr. Speaker, I am certainly not going to agree with the member. Since he has stated the track record of the Liberal government, I will remind him that the Liberals took over from the Mulroney government in 1993 when the government was left in an absolute mess. It was due to proper fiscal management and investment in important social programs for this country that we were able to deliver eight consecutive balanced budgets.

Let me tell the House about some of the investments that the Liberal government made for the—

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry, but there is no time for that.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert.

[Translation]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, I would like to congratulate the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie and thank him for raising the debate on poverty here in the House today. It has been quite some time since we have discussed this issue as seriously as this here in the House. The premises set out by my colleague from Sault Ste. Marie are good, and he has accurately identified the causes, effects and consequences of poverty in Canada and Quebec.

I would also like to remind the House that, in 1990, a motion was unanimously adopted right here in this House, promising to eliminate child poverty within 10 years. That was in 1990 and the promise was supposed to be fulfilled by the year 2000. Yet, now, in 2007, the situation is even more appalling than it was before.

Business of Supply

Once again, I would like to thank the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie for raising this debate on poverty and the working conditions I mentioned. As I said, the NDP premises are good. I believe they identified the causes correctly and gave a good analysis. The member for Sault Ste. Marie gave an excellent analysis. He is right: those least well off and most vulnerable are left to fend for themselves, especially by this Conservative government, this right-wing government whose main ideology is based on every man for himself and the law of the jungle.

We saw this earlier from the hon. member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, whose analyses were based not on compassion or empathy, but rather on a cold, economic analysis. Furthermore, I must add, this is not just a misstep by the government. It believes in this ideology. It feels compassion for the oil companies in Alberta. Indeed, we can see and feel that.

This government says it is getting things done. Of course it is. It reduced the GST by 1%, but a person needs to have money in order to buy things. This may be true for low income workers and students who want to succeed, as the hon. member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont was saying. It is true we have to give them a chance. Nonetheless, there are some people who did not get a chance at all and we have to help them. There are people who are unable to work—those who are disabled, those who are illiterate, seniors, young families, the homeless—who need this helping hand.

It is not good enough to tell these people that the oil companies in Alberta will get millions of dollars, but they can have the scraps. We must truly help other categories of people who are living below the poverty line. I am talking about the current Conservative government, but the Liberal government was no better. It made drastic cuts, to employment insurance in particular. It totally changed the program and turned it into a tax in disguise instead of making it a program to help the unemployed.

The Conservative government is hawkish. It is investing billions of dollars in war equipment and military expenses and cutting subsidies to the least fortunate. I will give some examples. This government bases its ideology on repressing people instead of helping them or providing funding for prevention. It is the sheriff of Nottingham instead of Robin Hood.

This government does not have the same values as Quebeckers. In Quebec we have developed a strategy to combat poverty, to provide a social safety net to help the less fortunate. We have compassion, empathy and sympathy. We understand the distress and anxiety of people living below the poverty line. We are trying to help them in every way possible to improve their situation, with a stronger economy, but we are also trying to help people who cannot make it on their own.

The Bloc staunchly defends the interests of the unemployed, older workers, women, minority groups and all Quebeckers, while the federal government, whether Liberal or Conservative, has abolished or limited the programs designed specifically for low income earners.

The Bloc Québécois acknowledges the importance of a national anti-poverty strategy. When we use the word “national”, we are referring to the nation of Quebec. Thus, we recognize the strategy of

the Quebec nation. The responsibility of the federal government is to provide adequate and temporary financial support—through transfers to Quebec—for the work of the governments, the provinces and Quebec in the fight against poverty.

● (1145)

The Bloc Québécois feels that, far from providing support, a pan-Canadian strategy established by the federal government duplicates what is being done in Quebec and in certain provinces.

The Bloc Québécois strongly believes that the minimum wage should not be the only aspect considered. There are other avenues used by the Quebec government—\$7 child care, benefits for low-income families, the lowest possible tuition fees—that are achieving real results in the fight against poverty.

As for the minimum wage, the Bloc Québécois would prefer that the federal government take some of the measures that for too long it has refused to implement, such as improving the EI program, financing the older worker support program, using the huge CMHC surpluses to finance the construction of affordable housing, and restoring funding for women's and literacy groups.

Finally, the Bloc Québécois is asking the federal government to immediately take measures to assist aboriginal peoples who are truly living in poverty. Poverty is found in society but it is also found at work. Sometimes our work is not enough to lift us out of poverty.

That is why the Bloc Québécois takes workers' needs into account. For example, we have introduced—and will reintroduce—a bill on preventive withdrawal in order to avoid having two categories of female workers in Quebec. Some are entitled to only five months at 55% of their gross salary to withdraw from an unhealthy work environment and experience the joys of pregnancy and a new baby. Other female workers in Quebec benefit from a real preventive withdrawal program that allows women working in an environment that is not good for their pregnancy to leave the work environment with 90% of their net salary. That is the sort of program that should also be put in place for workers governed by the Canada Labour Code.

This government should have introduced another program. It is an NDP initiative that was reintroduced by the Liberal government and should have been brought in by the Conservative government last December. I am talking about Bill C-55, which sought to establish a wage earner protection program in case of bankruptcy. It is time this Conservative government reintroduced this bill in the House so that we can quickly adopt this protection for wage earners when the company where they work goes bankrupt.

Business of Supply

Bill C-257, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code (replacement workers), would also help workers. Workers are currently on strike at CN. The company is spending more time challenging the legality of the strike, hiring American scabs, creating dissent among the new workers by hiring retirees and using all sorts of stalling tactics than actually sitting down with the unions to negotiate proper, balanced conditions. Meanwhile, the scabs are getting involved in a dispute that has nothing to do with them. This is unacceptable, and it is time this House adopted the anti-scab bill.

As for the actual minimum wage, section 178 of the Canada Labour Code reads as follows: “—not less than the minimum hourly rate fixed, from time to time, by or under an Act of the legislature of the province where the employee is usually employed—”. Currently, the province, Quebec, determines the minimum wage. The Bloc Québécois feels that this is as it should be. We see no reason to change this, no reason to give the federal government another opportunity to interfere in Quebec's areas of jurisdiction.

Quebec sets the minimum wage, and does a good job of it too. If there is any disagreement, we in Quebec discuss it with various unions, the FTQ, the CSN, social groups and the government. Together, we decide what the minimum wage should be. That way, we avoid creating two classes of workers—those who earn \$8 an hour under the Quebec Labour Code and those who earn more or less than that under the Canada Labour Code.

• (1150)

That way, there is no problem. Minimum wage is the same for everyone.

In addition to creating two classes of workers, unfortunately, not many people would benefit from this legislation. We know that 267,000 workers in Canada are covered under the Canada Labour Code and only 1% of them—18,000 people—would be affected by the NDP's measure. Yes, it would help some people, but I think this work needs to be done on a provincial level.

As for poverty in society, let us talk about employment insurance. If this government wants to do something, it must fix the employment insurance program, stop using it as a hidden tax and return the \$40 billion to the workers.

The Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities made 28 recommendations. All the government has to do is follow them. That way, we will be able to say that the government is really doing something to fight poverty.

I would also like to talk about the program for older worker adjustment, POWA. More and more, older workers are feeling POWA-less, if you will excuse the awful pun. The situation is getting worse and worse for older workers. We know that globalization is causing more and more workers to lose their jobs because more and more manufacturers are closing their doors.

Older workers, who sometimes have difficulty finding new jobs, need a bridge between when their company goes bankrupt, about when they are 55 or older, and when they begin receiving their Canada pension or Quebec pension.

I would also like to talk about child care. What the government did with respect to child care is an absolute scandal. At the federal level, there is a child care expense deduction. Canadians who pay the full cost benefit greatly. Conversely, since 200,000 children in Quebec attend day care centres at only one fifth of the cost—\$7 a day—parents in Quebec can only receive one fifth of the federal tax credit.

Given its refusal to adjust its taxation for the \$7-a-day child care program in Quebec, the federal government has thereby taken nearly \$1.5 billion from parents since 1998. This amount, taken away from parents in Quebec, is compensated by the Government of Quebec, since it assumes 80% of the cost of affordable child care. When it comes to child care, Quebec pays and Ottawa pockets the money. Year after year, the federal government steals \$250 million from parents in Quebec, or, on average, \$1,316 per child. That is more than the \$1,200, which of course is taxable, that the government proposed to give them in its last budget. This works out to a net loss of \$116 per child per family. The Conservative government says it wants to give parents the freedom to choose.

The first thing to be done is to stop penalizing parents in Quebec for having chosen to set up an affordable child care system. The federal government's fiscal policies must stop penalizing Quebec for having created a child care program that is unique in North America. Furthermore, the OECD calls it the best program in Canada and one of the best in the world.

For years the Bloc Québécois has been calling on the federal government to transfer to the Government of Quebec the money it is saving on the backs of Quebec families. This transfer would allow the Government of Quebec to invest in its family policy. When the federal government includes child care funding as part of resolving the fiscal imbalance, as the Minister of Industry promised to do in February 2006, it should also take into account the punitive effects of its tax system on Quebec parents. Resolving the fiscal imbalance should be comprehensive; but to be fair, it should not be uniform.

Let us now look at another aspect: the guaranteed income supplement for older persons. This is another Liberal government scandal and the Conservative government is heading down the same path.

In 2001, the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities identified, remarked and underscored that 68,000 people in Quebec were not receiving their guaranteed income supplement. The least fortunate in society receive a minimum and minimal pension. The federal government—whether Liberal or Conservative—through its management of this program, is preventing tens of thousands of people from receiving the guaranteed income supplement to which they are entitled. It is a real scandal.

The Bloc Québécois—thanks to our former member for Mauricie—launched a major campaign throughout Quebec to try to reach the least fortunate, the isolated, the sick, people who are unable to read or who do not speak either of the two official languages.

Business of Supply

•(1155)

These are the most vulnerable individuals in our society. Thanks to the Bloc Québécois, today they receive the guaranteed income supplement of \$6,600.

This Conservative government should pay them what they are owed, because it used these delaying tactics to avoid paying them earlier.

If this Conservative government wants to do something for the most disadvantaged, it should pay the retroactivity to seniors who need this guaranteed income supplement, because the government owes it to them.

As you are rising, Mr. Speaker, I assume I have little time left. However, I have yet to speak of social housing.

Some hon. members: There are four minutes left.

Ms. Carole Lavallée: Since I have four minutes, I have time to speak about social housing.

We have another scandal. CMHC will accumulate almost \$4 billion in 2008 while building little affordable housing and behaving more like Bill Gates than Mother Teresa. That is unacceptable.

The most needy families, the elderly and the handicapped must have affordable housing. We must help these individuals. That is one way to help them. When individuals have affordable housing that they can pay for out of their own income, they feel they are worthy of membership in this society, and they act accordingly.

September 25, 2006, was a sad day because the Conservative government announced a surplus of \$13 billion and, at the same time, cut \$1 billion from the organizations that need it the most, such as women's groups. We know that women are often among the most disadvantaged. There are also literacy groups. It makes no sense to cut the funding of these organizations. What can we do with citizens who are ill-equipped to participate in society? It is unacceptable to manage a country in this way. That is not a Canadian anti-poverty strategy.

In conclusion, the NDP has provided an excellent and sharp analysis. It clearly sees the causes and the consequences. Unfortunately, its conclusions cannot be applied. The Conservative government absolutely must transfer monies to the provinces; it must make financial transfers to the Government of Quebec—which has jurisdiction in this matter and also the competence, in terms of know-how and experience, to continue its own excellent national anti-poverty campaign—until the day Quebecers have a single labour code and a single strategy to fight poverty.

[*English*]

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her analysis. She talked about the importance of having a holistic anti-poverty strategy. She talked about the fact that in areas where there are bankruptcies, et cetera, the workers suffer. When the Liberal government was in power we understood that. It is the Conservatives who do not understand fiscal management at all. They brought the country to its knees. It was in

economic doldrums. Once the economic health of the country is back to normal, it is important to invest in programs.

Despite the fact that the country was in economic doldrums, there was lots of investment being made. There was investment being made in the national child benefit program. There was investment in women's programs. There was investment in CPP, which actually helps seniors.

I would like the member's comments on the fact that when the Minister of Finance is trying to determine the debt of the country, he utilizes the CPP to net out the debt. As well, I would like the member's comments on issues affecting women, children, seniors, aboriginals and people with literacy issues. She alluded to the fact that there have been homeless programs cancelled, youth employment programs cancelled, literacy programs cancelled, funding to the vulnerable cancelled. How do we go forward?

The Liberal government had implemented a national strategy. It had reduced income tax as opposed to a GST cut because a GST cut only affects the very rich. It had implemented an early learning and child care strategy. It had implemented the Kelowna accord. It had implemented issues around helping people with disabilities.

I would like the member's comments, please.

•(1200)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her excellent question. Unfortunately, she is going to be somewhat disappointed by my answer. Indeed, if the Conservatives have no empathy or sympathy for the neediest members of our society, and if their entire agenda is based on every man for himself and the law of the jungle, as I said earlier, the fact remains that the Liberal government was also extremely disappointing in the past.

I have already touched on this. For example, it was the Liberal government that completely changed the employment insurance program. It made cuts, which meant that fewer and fewer people, including women and young people, would meet the eligibility criteria for the EI program.

It was also the Liberal government that let the guaranteed income supplement program completely fall apart. That program targeted not only seniors—who usually need it most—but also our most needy seniors, those who are on their own, have a disability, do not speak either French or English, or who did not always understand how to deal with the federal government. Through all kinds of measures, the Liberal government denied 68,000 seniors in Quebec and more than 300,000 across Canada the guaranteed income supplement. When the time came to right their wrongs and grant retroactive payments to those seniors who had realized and applied for retroactivity, the Liberal government refused to grant it.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by congratulating my colleague from Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert for the analysis and conclusions she has brought to this debate. I remember how passionately she debated Bill C-257, which will soon come up for third reading in the House of Commons. It, too, is intended to provide better tools to those members of our society who are the least organized.

Business of Supply

My question for my colleague is this: no single measure can combat poverty. As we all know, over the years, the Canadian government, especially the previous Liberal government, has destroyed the social safety net that protected many of the most vulnerable members of our society.

I would like my colleague to comment on an approach that gives the Canadian government additional tools and responsibilities, even though it failed to fulfill its responsibilities in the past. Would it not make more sense to transfer the money being held here in Ottawa to the provinces, which are responsible for this matter?

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Chambly—Borduas is absolutely right. I do not think it makes sense to transfer, grant or give any new responsibilities to this federal government. This matter already falls under Quebec's jurisdiction. According to section 178 of the Canada Labour Code, Quebec and the provinces are already responsible for setting the minimum wage themselves.

I do not think we should ask the federal government to take back a responsibility that it delegated, especially since the government is doing a poor job of it. As I said earlier, the Liberals were a disappointment and the Conservatives are even worse. The Liberals sometimes blundered. They did so by mistake or for other reasons, but the Conservatives are doing it simply because of ideology. They do not care; they do not understand the anguish and distress of the poor, the elderly and people with disabilities.

• (1205)

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments.

We realize that the number of homeless people is growing in Canada. More people than ever before are turning to food banks. The most disadvantaged and the most vulnerable have been neglected.

Yet, I am puzzled by the Bloc Québécois position on this motion because even Quebec workers are in favour of it. It is a way to help workers now. Given the reality that Quebec is still part of this country, would it not be a way to help workers right now?

With regard to the potential independence or sovereignty of Quebec, we note that, in Europe, the situation of workers has improved. When a country improves its working conditions, workers in neighbouring countries also benefit. Therefore, even in the event of sovereignty, would conditions not be better if this minimum wage were implemented throughout Canada and if workers at least benefited from the \$10 minimum wage?

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question, which is extremely relevant and which I am very happy to answer.

First and foremost, the NDP motion will cover only 268,000 workers across Canada. There are 268,000 workers governed by the Canada Labour Code. In a province like Quebec, there will always be two codes. The Code du travail québécois covers nearly 90% of the labour force, while the Canada Labour Code covers less than 8%. This means that there will be two classes of workers in Quebec and all the other provinces. One class will earn a minimum wage of \$8, for example, while the other will earn \$10.

Currently, the federal government has delegated to the provinces the authority to set the minimum wage for workers who come under the Canada Labour Code. We in the Bloc Québécois think that this is a very good thing, because Quebec has not only the jurisdiction, but the ability to set an appropriate minimum wage for its workers.

Quebeckers are going to debate this issue among themselves. This is something we do well. It is true that we do not always agree. It is true that in Quebec, we engage in fierce, difficult, intense, reasoned, considered public debates. But we always agree in the end. Above all, we stay true to our own values, not the values of this Conservative government.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, poverty is a great shame in this country. It denies not only people's freedom and their hope, but their very dignity as persons, as fully participating citizens.

As the prosperity gap grows in Canada, as we have seen it grow, the reality is that it is threatening more and more working and middle class families who are just trying to get by. This is at the same time as we see the CEOs of the corporate giants securing astounding salaries, windfall incomes. Even as CEOs lose their jobs, they are given massive payouts. Yet working and middle class families are finding it harder and harder just to make ends meet.

[Translation]

Making ends meet is increasingly difficult for the average Canadian. That is the big problem. Poverty is increasing across Canada because of this.

The profits at big businesses, the big banks and the major oil companies are absolutely incredible. Last year the banks had profits of some \$19 billion while the major oil companies earned \$21 billion. There is prosperity, but who is prospering? Not everyone.

• (1210)

[English]

In a recent survey conducted by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, nearly half of all of the respondents said that they are one or two paycheques away from being poor. Two-thirds said that they are not benefiting from the economic growth that has been generated in this country.

Many of those living in poverty are working full time. In one-quarter of the poor families in Canada one member is working full time. Something is gravely wrong with an economy when full time workers are living in poverty.

Business of Supply

I remember talking to a hotel worker. He was a new Canadian working as a server in the hotel. I asked him how things were going and he said that things were going well. He said that he had a full time job at the hotel working 40 hours a week which produced enough income for him to pay the rent, and his second job allowed him to pay for the food for his family. I thought that was a pretty stinging indictment.

If one cannot have a full time job that covers one's rent in this economy, then we are facing a very tragic situation, but we can do something about it. We do not have to accept this circumstance. Of course, the prosperity gap that we are talking about disproportionately affects certain groups in our society more than others: women, aboriginals, the disabled, and new Canadians, the immigrants to this country.

To speak about the situation facing women, they earn 71¢ on the dollar compared to what men make. More women work two jobs than men do. The figure is 6.1% of employed women take more than one job to make ends meet, only two-thirds of that number in the case of men. One in five women in Canada lives in poverty. That is 2.8 million women, and we need to also consider their children.

With respect to immigrants, during their first year here, new Canadians are 3.5 times more likely than native born Canadians to fall into a low income category. Even after the first year a disproportionate share, 2.5 times more than those born in Canada, find themselves in a chronic state of low income. Of course, part of this is because we invite them here based on their experience and credentials to work in good jobs and when they arrive they find the doors are slammed shut in their faces and they end up having to work at very low wage jobs, including minimum wage positions. This is why our party is advocating a first step in addressing the issue of poverty which would have to do with establishing a \$10 minimum wage.

Mr. Speaker, I neglected to indicate at the beginning that I will be sharing my time with the member for Hamilton Mountain, with the indulgence of the House.

With respect to aboriginal people, 40% of off reserve aboriginal children are living in poverty. This is not only a national disgrace but it is drawing the attention of the global advocacy groups, which are saying they are going to have to come in and help in Canada to deal with poverty.

Students are already saddled with record debt. We have taken our national debt and put it on their shoulders. They are now having to work in minimum wage jobs to pay the rent, cover their food costs and deal with skyrocketing tuition. When we look at the record of past Conservative and Liberal governments over the last period of time, frankly, nothing has been done to close this prosperity gap. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Tuition fees have been rising very rapidly and families cannot afford to send their kids to college.

• (1215)

[Translation]

As far as child care is concerned, the Liberals and the Conservatives have been breaking their promises for years. Giving parents \$100 a month for child care is said to be a policy. It is not right.

[English]

Most unemployed workers cannot even get access to employment insurance under the rules that have been created by the previous Liberal government. Even though they have to pay into the program, they cannot get help when their families are facing poverty and are on the brink.

It is not fair to working people. No wonder there is this sense of increased anxiety on the part of an awful lot of people who work for their living and are struggling.

We need a strategy here in Canada to tackle this prosperity gap. We have to put together a plan that includes many different elements and components. Most of the solutions are well known: affordable child care, affordable housing, these sorts of steps, industrial strategies to establish and keep good jobs which are draining away from this country at a ferocious rate. Whether it be in the resource sector where we sell out our resources, like the softwood sellout, or our manufacturing sector, our governments are in a state of denial even as hundreds of thousands of jobs disappear.

We believe that a starting point for this national strategy is to establish a minimum wage for the federally regulated industries.

The Liberals eliminated this in 1996 and low income workers have suffered as result of that decision. Low income workers and working families have ended up in poverty because of that decision by the Liberal government. Shame on the Liberal Party for having brought in such a policy.

When the federal minimum wage was there, it had a trend-setting effect. In a sense, it embarrassed perhaps provinces to take action. It kept the minimum wage in the different provinces in their regulated industries and sectors relatively closely tied together.

But now, since the federal government abandoned its responsibility for leadership here, we have seen the minimum wages in provinces divert so that they range now from \$6.50 an hour in New Brunswick to \$8.50 an hour in Nunavut, a difference of \$2 an hour or 25%, and frankly it is unacceptable.

The current leader of the Liberal Party, Mr. Dion, was a minister in the cabinet that passed that order and—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Toronto—Danforth is an experienced parliamentarian and he knows not to name other members by their given names but only by title or by name of riding.

Hon. Jack Layton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The current leader of the Liberal Party, the leader of the official opposition, was at the time in the cabinet that passed the order eliminating the federal minimum wage and has to take some responsibility for the poverty that has resulted as a consequence.

What has happened is that Canada has fallen from first to sixth on the UN's human development index because of the increase in poverty in this country. Shame.

As more and more working and middle income Canadians are being pushed to the edge of poverty, the fact is that the growing prosperity gap is something that requires our immediate attention.

Business of Supply

It is time to make life fair and affordable for Canadians. The \$10 an hour federal minimum wage would do this.

[Translation]

I am saddened to hear the Bloc, those members who are all talk and no action. They are saying that they do not want to support a \$10 minimum wage for federal employees working in Quebec under a federal system. I am sorry to hear that and I hope I misunderstood.

Jean Charest's policy now is to establish the minimum wage at \$8 an hour. We are proposing an increase for federally governed sectors and the Bloc is rejecting this proposal. The workers in these sectors will have to remain in their state of poverty because of how the Bloc votes. I hope they will change their mind before the vote.

[English]

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have to rise on this one because I heard the hon. member talking about the big corporations, the big money and the working poor.

In Saskatchewan, which has an NDP government, crown corporations gave their CEOs one tremendous wage. It was almost prohibitive compared to the raises that the working people in Saskatchewan were receiving. The union there, SGEU, represents the people who run the snowplows on our highways. They went on strike because they could not get a raise. These people asked for a raise but they could not get it. They asked for a raise because the crown corporations gave their CEOs a tremendous raise.

I find it rather hypocritical to hear the member talking about this party and the CEOs and big raises when in fact that is exactly what his counterparts in our province did. They have a monopoly. They have control. They give raises to CEOs, but the hard-working people who really do the ground work have to go on strike. Replacement workers took their place, which is another issue that we have to question. Replacement workers were needed in our province to ensure that the best interests of the public were—

• (1220)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The member for Toronto—Danforth.

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, the member's comments are factually incorrect. The workers in Saskatchewan have received a wage increase. It is true that a labour process had to be undertaken, but that happens with governments and the private sector all the time. That is why we have this sort of legislation. That is why we have bargaining and why we have these procedures. To leave the suggestion that there was no change in compensation is factually incorrect, so I think we had better correct the record.

The member mentioning it, of course, gives us the opportunity to recall what happened when the Conservative Party was in power in Saskatchewan. It was not an era that the member chose to mention. Perhaps that is because almost half of the cabinet ended up in jail and the province ended up with a credit rating that could not be established by any legitimate credit agency because the deficits and debts had built up to such a point that the province was an economic basket case.

Fortunately, the NDP came along and in four successive governments balanced budgets were secured and the economy is now back on track with NDP leadership, which I am sure the member for Blackstrap meant to mention but did not have the chance to do so.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the member for Toronto—Danforth. He referred to a couple of points that I would like to touch upon. He talked about affordable housing, child care, and funding for post-secondary education.

As a former independent entrepreneur, I never believed that making a profit were dirty words. As a matter of fact, I was always trying to make a profit because it allowed me as the principal owner of a company to contribute to the system as best I could.

I know the hon. member cares. I grew up in the area he now represents. I often go to my riding of Scarborough Centre, and I just want to pass on to him some of the comments I have heard from people there and why they are upset. We had a deal on the table for child care. We had funding for post-secondary education and for affordable housing. Why did those members betray the nation and overthrow the government when those programs could have been implemented? Those members let Canadians down.

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, I am in close touch with my constituents, which the hon. member for Scarborough Centre chose to reference. What I hear from them, and what the results of the vote that took place just a year ago showed, is that they felt the Liberal Party had not earned their confidence. It promised child care for many years, but did not deliver it. The Liberal Party had, in fact, eliminated the affordable housing program entirely, which has driven up homelessness in this country.

• (1225)

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to participate in today's debate regarding the NDP motion calling on the House to implement a national anti-poverty strategy.

In a country as wealthy as ours, it is simply not fair that so many people must struggle constantly just to survive. One in six Canadians now lives in poverty and they are defying the stale stereotypes of the poor. About 1.2 million of those living in poverty are children. Many others are adults facing tough barriers to employment while a quarter of poor families have someone working full time for low wages.

In a recent survey half of all working families said that they are just a couple of missed paycheques away from falling into poverty themselves. Poverty denies people freedom and hope, and it is the biggest single factor contributing to ill health.

Business of Supply

When NDP members of Parliament defend good paying jobs and affordable training, we are defending ordinary people's freedom to thrive in good health. When NDP members promote affordable housing, we are standing up for two million families who cannot find shelter they can afford, and who must sacrifice other essentials or fall into homelessness. We promote fair security measures for vulnerable families, like secure pensions, adequate EI and decent social assistance.

At a time when even middle income families are feeling squeezed, New Democrats are working to make life more affordable, from laying a reliable foundation for affordable child care to ending unfair ATM fees. If we were not here in the House to raise these issues, who would be standing up to confront poverty?

Fighting poverty clearly does not fit the Conservatives' ideology, but if the Conservatives are the problem, the Liberals are not the answer. During their 10 years in power, when push came to shove, the Liberals cut corporate taxes and left our social safety net in tatters. They ended the federal role in welfare by cancelling the cost shared Canada assistance plan. They gutted employment insurance so that two-thirds of workers no longer qualify for benefits and they axed the world recognized affordable housing program New Democrats helped to create.

Moreover, the Liberals cut billions from education transfers, even as they wasted billions on corporate tax cuts. These cuts impoverished both students and the Canadian economy.

Canada's prosperity depends on how well we can equip today's young people with the skills they will need for tomorrow's economy. So it is both unfair and unwise to let soaring tuition costs push education and training out of reach of so many ordinary families.

Post-secondary education can open doors but it can also be a debt sentence. The average debt for university students at graduation last year was \$24,047. Just yesterday I met with two medical students from McMaster University who told me that the average debt among their peers was over \$100,000.

That kind of debt can choke young people's freedom to buy a first home, to start a family, or to pursue specialized training. Even the prospect of crippling debt can dissuade students from pursuing advanced education. Our kids should not have to mortgage their futures to get the skills they need to get decent paying jobs.

The solutions are right here in front of us. We need to create a system of needs based grants to offset student loans, replacing today's patchwork of tax credits and saving schemes that disproportionately benefit the wealthy. We need to overhaul the Canada student loans program to be more flexible, fair and responsive to the needs of every day students.

We need to ensure stable, adequate federal transfers for education and training by passing the NDP's post-secondary education act so every province can lower tuition and invest to improve education.

These are concrete steps to ensure that ordinary students will not continually be squeezed by the compounding pressures of rising tuition fees and jobs with an inadequate minimum wage.

However, concrete action is not a forte of this government. While it pays lip service to supporting a whole range of issues that would

help financially challenged Canadians, in the end its rhetoric is not matched by action.

Therefore, I bet at the end of today's debate we will find all parties of the House supporting our motion to establish a national anti-poverty strategy, just like all parties supported a motion in 1989 that was introduced by former NDP leader, Ed Broadbent, calling for the eradication of child poverty in Canada by they year 2000.

Yet, today there are still 1.2 million children who are looking to their government to provide them with more than rhetoric. That figure includes an appalling one in four children in my home town of Hamilton.

Similarly, the House passed my seniors charter in June of last year. One of its guarantees was income security for seniors. Yet in Hamilton, one in four seniors still lives in poverty. Again, the government has been all talk and no action.

● (1230)

The Conservative government chooses whom to help by its own criteria of who is deserving and who is undeserving in its electoral universe. That record is not good enough. Confronting poverty is not optional, it is the essential recognition of the human dignity in everyone.

The NDP has proposed some concrete steps to address the growing prosperity gap in Canada by making life more affordable for low income and middle income Canadians.

First and foremost, we must repair the social safety net for vulnerable families, including more affordable housing and fair social assistance. We also need to repair employment insurance so it will work again for working families. We need to secure and improve public health care for today's families. We need to lay a permanent foundation for affordable child care. We also need to ensure we do not drive students into lives of poverty, by easing student debt and making education and training affordable for ordinary students. We need to end unfair ATM fees and address predatory credit card interest rates. We need to restore the federal minimum wage.

I know I only have a few minutes left to speak on the broad based motion before us today, but allow me to focus, in the time remaining to me, on one last item, and that is the restoration of the federal minimum wage.

Business of Supply

How absurd is it that in a country as strong and vibrant as Canada we have people we call the working poor? No one who is working full time should be living in poverty. A living wage in Hamilton requires an hourly wage of over \$12, and yet we still have people balking at the very notion of raising the minimum wage to even \$10. Canada has a strong economy, yet internationally we are considered a low wage country with high rates of poverty. It is time for the federal government to show some leadership.

The federal minimum wage was eliminated in 1996 under the Liberal government. The argument then, as now, was that an increased minimum wage would hurt the economy and cost jobs. In fact, study after study has proven that there is no correlation between the loss of jobs and raising the minimum wage, nor of a detrimental effect on the economy.

David Card and Alan Krueger's "Myth and Measurement: The New Economics of the Minimum Wage", and Goldberg and Green's "Raising the Floor: The Social and Economic Benefits of Minimum Wages in Canada" are but two examples of many studies that have proven this.

As Nobel Prize winner Robert Solow confirmed that the:

main thing about the research is that the evidence of the job loss is weak....And the fact that the evidence is weak suggests the impact on jobs is small.

We can also look to Australia, where the minimum wage is \$13, or France, or England or Ireland to prove that raising the minimum wage helps, not hurts, the economy. It has been proven over and over again that poverty keeps countries and provinces poor, both economically and morally.

That leads me to the ultimate reason to raise the minimum wage. It is ethical and moral. We know that poverty is associated with lower life expectancy, worse health, impoverished chances of advancement and crime and violence in our neighbourhoods, all extremely costly to our economy and children.

Studies have shown us that we can afford to raise the minimum wage. The real question now is, can we afford not to?

Canada is an extraordinary place to live. Our economy is strong, our public service is respected, our charitable organizations are remarkably diverse and active. Our country is one of the world's most robust multicultural societies. We are internationally regarded as a caring, inclusive and progressive society. It is time we live up to that reputation and commit to a Canada without poverty.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the retirement of Ed Broadbent back in 1989, he put forward a motion that sought to achieve the elimination of poverty by the year 2000. It is interesting and it is repeated often. It was not to eliminate absolutely, but it has been used that way. I take it for its debating purpose.

The fact remains that problems within the Canadian family have a great deal to do with poverty. In fact, lone parent families represent about 15% of all families in Canada, but they account for about 54% of all children living in poverty. Broken and lone parent families account for over half of the problem, yet only represent 15% of all families.

Maybe the member would like to comment on this. Is it possible that the motion to seek to achieve the elimination of poverty within a certain period of time can be handled by dollars and cents as opposed to dealing with the root cause, which is the erosion of the Canadian family?

• (1235)

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, I recall the member's intervention earlier in this debate. He has showed us that he is a naturalist with a sense of humour. He likened the new government to, I think he called it, a dumb wildebeest, or the gnu government.

I want to play to his naturalist tendencies. For the member to make naturalist analogies, I am sure he would appreciate that his government acted very much like an ostrich, when it had its opportunity, because it stuck its head in the sand.

When we look at the 13 year record of the Liberals with respect to eradicating poverty, there is a reason why Mr. Broadbent's motion, his vision, was never achieved. We had 13 years of cuts to affordable housing, education, training, programs for women, all of the programs that would have been meaningful in the lives of lone parent families.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I remind the member from Hamilton of the forum in her community. We listened to a significant number of people who came forward to speak to us about some of the really exciting work that was being done in that community. They also spoke about the lack of resources and leadership coming from the federal government.

Could she be a bit more parochial for a second and tell us a bit about what is happening in Hamilton and why it is so important that we find the political will and the leadership to launch this comprehensive anti-poverty strategy?

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, my colleagues from Hamilton, the member for Hamilton Centre and the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek were delighted to host the member for Sault Ste. Marie in our community and to introduce him to some of the really exciting work that was happening at the municipal level. It was launched by the former mayor of our city. It is the anti-poverty round table, which is undertaking some groundbreaking work.

Its members, however, need some support and they need it from all levels of government. We heard from groups that bemoaned the lack of affordable housing in our community and the fact we did have a policy that would raise our minimum wage to a living wage. Let us be clear, raising the minimum wage to \$10 an hour is but a step in that process.

They talked about child care. We have some excellent history in our community with the best start program. We heard representations about that. We need to bring these voices back to the House. The advocates in our community need to be heard. That is why we have brought forward this motion today, so the excellent work that takes place in communities like Hamilton and Vancouver can be brought here and broadened into a national anti-poverty strategy.

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Barrie.

Business of Supply

I am pleased to respond to the motion by the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie. I am sure that every member in the House shares the hon. member's concern for the working and middle class families. We all work very hard in the House to implement programs and policies to ensure that no Canadians fall behind, and to help them if they do. I can assure members, through working on the committee with the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie, that he raises this is an issue of concern on a constant basis. I know his thoughts and intentions are very real in this respect and it is something about which he has been concerned for some time.

I also remind hon. members that since taking office, the government has not only reduced the GST to increase the amount that Canadians can earn without paying federal tax, but it has also permanently reduced the lowest income tax rates. In fact, over 655,000 low income Canadians will be removed from the tax rolls all together as a result of the government's tax measures.

I believe these are the kinds of initiatives that will have a major impact on the lives of the working and middle class Canadian families. They also have a more immediate impact than the kinds of measures the hon. member's party propose, measures that require more government intervention and as a result, higher taxes.

I also welcome this opportunity to address some of the other many measures that Canada's new government is taking to promote the economic well-being of Canadians. Conservatives share the member's dedication to eliminating poverty in Canada. To do this, we believe the government must first invest in the financial security of Canada and its citizens, and we are doing that.

The measures that we have introduced are designed to promote today's economy and to build a prosperous tomorrow for the benefit of all Canadians. Before examining these measures, let us take a brief look at Canada's economy as a whole and the state of our labour market.

Our economy is booming. With that, goes higher employment rates. According to the latest Statistics Canada labour force survey, employment rose by an estimated 22,000 in April and is up almost 1% this year, or double the pace of growth observed over the first four months of last year. Unemployment is hovering at a 30 year low. More Canadians are at work than ever. This translates into greater employment opportunities across the country, and I know of no greater anti-poverty measure than a job.

Nevertheless, we recognize that not everyone is equipped to participate in a booming economy. This is why the new government is making many important investments that recognize the importance of supporting skills development and learning, from apprenticeships to post-secondary education, from academic infrastructure to research and development, from child care to youth programs, to programs for older workers and new Canadians. These measures will help ensure that Canadians keep up with the ever growing knowledge economy, the best means of securing a well paid job.

We also recognize, however, that there are vulnerable members of our society who need and deserve additional support. Even in times of prosperity, there are those who need temporary financial assistance when they are between jobs.

Employment insurance is there for them. EI also offers support to workers who must be absent from work owing to sickness or caring for gravely ill relatives. Maternity and parental benefits are available for parents to take an absence from work for up to a year to care for a new born child.

It is also there for older workers. In a work world, older workers are often the most vulnerable. That is why we are taking action, through the employment insurance program, to provide a total of \$1.4 billion to support some 230,000 unemployed older workers annually.

In employment programs funded in EI part II, more than 80,000 unemployed workers aged 50 and over were helped to obtain and maintain employment through training, work experience and aid in starting a new business. This figure represents 12% of all the workers assisted by these programs. These are tangible supports that older workers want in order to remain active and to continue to be contributing members of the workforce.

We continue to examine ways to assist older workers. We are undertaking a targeted older workers strategy to help older workers with retraining. Changes in the global economy can affect us here at home. We understand that we need to be ready for this.

The shame of the last decade was that the Liberals did nothing for older workers but talk about studying a problem everyone knew was coming. It is a telling sign that the Liberal member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor recently came out against our older worker programs, and the Liberal leader has said nothing about this.

● (1240)

What about foreign credential recognition? Workers new to Canada often have difficulty finding employment. Canada's new government is working on a foreign credential recognition program to speed up their ability to integrate into the labour market and society. While the Liberals talk about the issue and the NDP hold press conferences, the new government is acting.

I will give one example. The British Columbia Institute of Technology, Campus Canada and the United Chinese Community Enrichment Services Society will receive funding to develop the partnerships necessary to develop overseas information services, assessing of services, skills upgrading, Canadian workplace experience, opportunities and enhanced settlement support to skilled immigrants. This support will be offered both prior to and upon their arrival in Canada.

Projects such as these help, not only to combat poverty among immigrants, but also help all Canadians to benefit and prosper from their expertise.

Business of Supply

The NDP motion being put forward today does not address immigrants. However, the Conservatives knew that immigrants were falling behind under the previous Liberal government. It took real leadership by the Prime Minister and the government to see the problem and to act on it. We have reduced in half the right of permanent residence fee that the Liberals imposed on newcomers. We have ended the decade long freeze the Liberals imposed on funding to community based agencies that help newcomers adapt and integrate into Canada.

The NDP and the Liberals were against the immigration measures in our budget but Canadians and immigrants were not. They know the Conservatives not only support immigration but we want to give immigrants the tools they need to succeed and to take full part in Canada's prosperity.

What about seniors? The new government is also taking action to ensure seniors can enjoy their retirement and financial security. The new government listens to seniors and they support us. The fact is that the NDP motion misstates the success Canada has been making for seniors.

Over the past 25 years, poverty has been going down for seniors in Canada. The percentage of seniors living below Statistics Canada's low income cutoff has gone from 21.3% in 1980 to 5.6% in 2004, an all time low. This trend is due, in large part, to income security programs, the old age security program and the Canada pension plan. We have introduced an act to amend these programs to simplify access to and delivery of the benefits. One of the amendments would enable Canadians who file tax returns to apply for the guaranteed income supplement only once. After their initial application, their annual tax filings would largely determine whether or not they receive GIS from year to year. They would never need to re-apply.

We are also continuing our extensive efforts to reach out to those seniors who may be eligible for GIS but who do not fill out tax returns. Since 2002, by sending potentially eligible seniors preprinted applications, an additional 250,000 are receiving the supplement, over and above the 560,000 seniors who applied for GIS along with their OAS applications.

While the NDP talks about action plans, the new government takes action. We have appointed a Secretary of State for Seniors and committed to establishing the National Seniors Council. The council will be an advisory body with an integrated approach to enhancing the well-being of Canadian seniors. The council will address the challenges and opportunities presented by Canada's aging population.

The new homelessness partnership strategy is our way of combating homelessness and helping those at risk of becoming homeless. The Conservative approach to housing involves partnerships. It involves local communities taking an interest in the lives of those who live in their community. The NDP want to build a bureaucracy. We want to build homes.

We have been working with provinces and territories on how best to address the needs of particular regions and communities. More important, we have been working with them on building more affordable housing. Through the homelessness partnering strategy,

hope is being given to the homeless with sustainable solutions to become active members of Canadian society.

As the Commissioner of the Salvation Army said, "We are extremely grateful for the generous support of the federal government and we value this partnership and their commitment to supporting vulnerable Canadians".

The Commissioner of the Salvation Army was right. We are committed to supporting vulnerable Canadians. We are committed to supporting all Canadians to achieve economic security. The measures that I have outlined are only a few examples of the many steps that the government is taking to ensure all Canadians can enjoy prosperity and well-being.

I can also assure the House that we do not want to work independently. We are in constant communication and consultation with the provinces and territories, as well as a multitude of stakeholders across the country.

I believe our approach is the right one. The evidence of the economy backs us up. Therefore, as much as I appreciate the hon. member's sentiments, I am not able to support the motion the way it is.

● (1245)

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure all members in the House appreciate the broad array of backstop programs that are provided to seniors and those on fixed incomes but the thrust of the NDP's motion is aimed at those who are not making, what I would describe, which I think is accurate, a minimum fair wage.

In region after region, charitable organizations, like the United Way, have done an analysis that indicates that the gap in the general market basket, so to speak, the food basket for those who are at minimum wage, is widening. The ability to even get food is requiring the working poor to go to food banks across the country. Surely that is anathema to us in our civil society.

The member and his party have articulated the relevance of the guaranteed annual income supplement as it applies to seniors. Would he feel that it would be a more equitable approach, notwithstanding the validity of the approach taken by the NDP in my mind, to look at that kind of mechanism, a guaranteed annual wage, in particular as it would work through the taxation system, the linkage of which his party is very much in favour of, that would work toward the introduction of that kind of universal, right through the taxation system for the working poor?

● (1250)

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Speaker, the member has raised one approach but I do not think it is the only approach, as has been suggested before in the House.

If we were to look at markets in the different provinces, such as in Alberta, I think we would be hard-pressed to find a minimum wage as low as \$10. I realize the economy is booming in Fort McMurray but I think employers in most service organizations would have a hard time hiring anybody for less than \$15 to \$20 an hour. That is why previous governments, including the Conservative government, looked at the wide range of programs that are available.

Business of Supply

When we looked at this new universal child care benefit, we realized that not all people would take advantage of it or need it but we did not want to discriminate from person to person. The \$100 per month for each child under the age of six gives parents an opportunity, regardless of what part of the country they are in, to take advantage of the universal child care benefit.

I would suggest to my hon. colleague that there are many different market conditions across the country and some conditions dictate higher wages in some parts of the country and possibly lower wages in other parts of the country because of the economic conditions and the cost of living in those particular regions.

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two very quick questions.

First, the member mentioned a number of steps that have been taken by his government. However, without an overall sense of where we are going and what our targets and timelines are, it is difficult to see if we will get there. I am wondering if he could tell us what the Conservative government's target is because it seems to agree that poverty must be eradicated. I am wondering what its target and timelines are to eradicate it.

Second, during the employability study I am sure the member remembers the person from the employers' association who mentioned that one of the greatest difficulties for women was the lack of child care in Alberta, for example, in comparison to Quebec which has a child care program. I am wondering if he could talk about how useful the government's program is in alleviating poverty for women who need to work.

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Speaker, I just want to thank the hon. member for Victoria for all her hard work on the employability study.

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the motion of the member for Sault Ste. Marie. I will focus my speech on the topic of health and the well-being of Canadians and women.

This government understands that good physical and mental health will help all Canadians contribute and prosper in their communities and ensure that these communities stay prosperous. In other words, strong, successful economies and communities require healthy individuals. Having healthy and successful individuals and communities will go a long way to dealing with the issue of poverty.

When it comes to health, this government has done more in 13 months than the previous government did in 13 years. It was under the old Liberal government that Canadians saw wait times continuously rise. The Liberals are trying to brand themselves as a party of social justice. The provinces, which deliver health, education, literacy and social benefit programs, saw their budgets cut by \$25 billion when the previous Liberal government made cuts to transfers. That is some social justice agenda.

One thing this government will not do is make a \$25 billion cut to health and social transfers that the provinces depend upon to fund services to the many vulnerable and low income Canadians.

Because Canadians are clambering for leadership, they asked this government to do things differently. We are making significant and

effective investments in Canadians' well-being to help them reach their full potential.

In the area of health care, this government has made a campaign commitment to implement a national wait time guarantee. Within our federal jurisdiction, for reserves and with pilots elsewhere, we have made significant progress on that commitment. We are taking action right now.

In January, this government announced a third wait time guarantee. We announced a 15 month wait time guarantee pilot project, investing \$2.6 million for children in need of surgery. This project includes the development of the first pan-Canadian wait times information system to measure the burden of waiting times for children who need surgery.

This government is about making investments that have a positive impact on the lives of Canadians and helping them improve their lives.

We understand how poverty can become entrenched in some families and how crucial it is to improve their long term prospects through education, employment and, yes, appropriate government policies that will support their climb up the economic ladder.

If we look at the labour market performance of women in Canada over the last decade, it has been positive. Many women in Canada have been able to seize upon the new labour market opportunities and have experienced consequent gains in their income and assets. The participation rates for women rose from 57% in 1996 to 62% in 2006. The rate of low income Canadians among women declined from 16.5% in 1997 to 11.7% in 2004. This means that 587,000 fewer women were living in low income in 2004 compared to 1996.

Despite this success, there are segments of the female population who continue to experience higher levels of low income than their male counterparts. This is a reflection on both the circumstances and decisions.

Poverty rates among seniors, both men and women, singles and couples, have declined significantly over the past 25 years. Poverty among seniors fell from a high of 21.3% in 1980 to 5.6% in 2004. That in itself is a Canadian success story.

Despite this impressive progress, senior women experience higher rates of low income than their male counterparts. For example, 17.6% of unattached senior women lived in low income in 2004 compared to 11.6% of unattached senior men. Overall, women comprised 72% of all seniors living in low income in 2004.

Business of Supply

Why is that the case? Older women were less likely than the young women of today to engage in substantial paid work outside the home. As a result, these women have had lower levels of contribution to the Canada pension plan and workplace pension plans. For younger generations of women, retirement will be quite different. In fact, their retirement income should be more similar to their male counterparts than the senior women of today.

The labour force participation rate of women in the core working years from age 40 to 44 in 2006 was 80% and 71% were contributing to the CPP. These figures are roughly double what they were for women now in their early seventies. Workplace pension coverage is also almost twice as high among these younger cohorts.

• (1255)

Despite the positive outlook in retirement, there are significant challenges that remain for younger women, as for every generation, it is young women who have children and who are often the main caregiver. There are challenges for young parents, in particular, young mothers who juggle the demands of a career and family related responsibilities. Reduced attachment to the labour market, costs of day care and other child related expenses can compete with other critical financial needs, including saving for retirement.

In 2001 one in five families with children was headed by a female lone parent, double since 1971. Single parent families are five times more likely to live in low income than two parent families. Over 80% of single parent families are headed by women.

On a positive side, the low income rate for single mothers has declined considerably in recent years from 52.7% in 1996 to 35.6% in 2004. Women are also more likely to experience persistent low income than men. Between 1999 and 2004, 6.3% of women lived in low income situations for at least four years compared to 4.6% for men.

There are also particular groups of women at a higher risk of persistent low income. These groups include women with disabilities, immigrant women and aboriginal women. Women with disabilities make up the majority, 55% of adults with disabilities, and this increases with age. Their median income is significantly less than that of men: \$15,500 compared to \$28,157 for men with disabilities.

Immigrant women also face challenges. In 2000, 23% of foreign born women lived in a low income situation, considerably higher than Canadian born women. This is despite the fact that a higher proportion of foreign born women have a university degree.

The women's unemployment rate has declined significantly over time and is currently at a 30 year low, 6.1% in 2006. Women are more highly represented than men in non-standard employment, particularly in part time and temporary work, 40% compared to 34% for men in 2006. This has implications for income and earnings and private pension coverage rates.

Women have also made considerable strides in education attainment. The national graduate survey tells us that in 2003 women represented 60% of all university graduates, which is an encouraging sign.

Responding to the challenges I have mentioned requires the efforts of all sectors of society, including the provinces and territories as well as employers, employees and the labour movement. The Government of Canada plays a key role in this area, primarily through income support programs, tax benefits and transfers to provinces and other partners. In the interest of time I will not detail these programs, but I would like to underline the importance of helping women increase their labour market participation in recent years.

That concludes my remarks, and I will close on this point. Unlike the member for Sault Ste. Marie, I believe that we should give women in Canada credit for helping us all climb steadily up the economic ladder.

• (1300)

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me congratulate my colleague for doing the research on those issues. He is well aware of what the numbers are.

Clearly women have been struggling for a very long time. If women are going to be able to become financial independent, they need to have a variety of services available to them. What frequently happens is women end up with the responsibility of caring for the children. Without having somewhere to care for the children, it is very difficult for them to be able to go to school to increase their education. At the end of the day a woman carries a huge responsibility when it comes to being the mother of the household.

Does the member not think it would be very helpful to have our minimum wage at \$10 and try to provide more income so that women and men and families would not have to go on the welfare system? If people could get a \$10 an hour job it would be much more possible that they would have a better future.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, it is always interesting to hear issues brought forward by the Liberal Party, specifically on these two issues.

On the minimum wage I would note that the Liberal premier of Ontario was the one who recently rejected the minimum wage. In the native city of the member who asked the question, the Liberals received a significant electoral loss with the recognition by Premier Dalton McGuinty that the \$10 minimum wage would have consequences for the Ontario economy. To hear a Liberal member preach in favour of the \$10 minimum wage when her party's leader in Ontario has argued the exact opposite is a little hypocritical.

In terms of child care I note that the Liberals promised child care in 1993. It was in their platform commitment. Thirteen years later, there was nothing, not a single child care space.

The Conservative government has already begun delivering \$100 cheques for all children in need of child care, for young Canadian families. It is the current Liberal leader who is saying that he wants to rip those funds away from Canadian parents, from Canadian families, people who need it, low income Canadians.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the speech made by the member for Barrie. He serves with me on the human resources and social development committee. We have lots of back and forth about important issues such as the one we are addressing here this morning.

Business of Supply

He spoke very eloquently about the challenges women in Canada face today. He indicated that women make up a disproportionate number of those experiencing poverty, even in this country's good economy. Yes, unemployment may be low, but the poor who were living on assistance and are now moving into employment, which is what they want to do, are finding that once they move into employment, poverty still exists. In fact, in some instances when they move from assistance to employment, because of what they lose by way of health care, et cetera, the poverty gets worse.

What would my colleague suggest? We are saying that the minimum wage should be raised. This would significantly help a lot of working women who find themselves in low wage jobs. If that is not something that he thinks would be helpful, what would be?

• (1305)

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada has put \$526 million toward fighting homelessness and helping low income families renovate their homes. It has also dedicated an additional \$1.4 billion to three housing trusts.

I would note that the best recipe for creating jobs is a strong economy. Obviously, we see what happens with the New Democratic philosophy when the New Democrats are in power, for example, Glen Clark in British Columbia, or Bob Rae in Ontario. Low income Canadians in those provinces lost jobs. The NDP governments in those provinces created poverty by hampering the economy.

We need to continue with the approach this government is taking by fostering and building a strong Canadian economy to make sure as many Canadians as possible have jobs.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Victoria.

I am glad there has been some acknowledgement of the plight of women in this country. I just wish there were some acknowledgement of the impact of unfair trade agreements, whether it be the Mulroney agreement or the Chrétien agreement in terms of poverty and those who are seeking to escape it.

The federal minimum wage was eliminated in 1996 under the Liberal government. This has proved to be less than a good thing for too many Canadians. The Canadian Labour Congress has found that a single person working full time in Canada needs an hourly rate of at least \$10 to reach a poverty line income.

Initially, minimum wage was introduced to ensure that anyone working would not be poor. Sadly, in most provinces the minimum wage is so low that even someone working full time for an entire year falls far short of the poverty line. The low level of minimum wage is a major reason behind the high rates of poverty in Canada and persistently high levels of economic inequality.

According to the latest data from the National Council of Welfare almost five million Canadians, including 1.2 million children, were living in poverty in 2003. Not much has changed since then.

There are two issues related to poverty and income that I would like to highlight today. First, I would like to speak about how raising the minimum wage will specifically help many women across this great country. Second, I want to discuss how important housing is

and how raising the minimum wage will help make it more affordable.

Raising the minimum wage will have a significant impact on many women in this country. In 2004, 394,800 women were working for minimum wage. Sixty-four per cent of minimum wage earners in Canada are women. The poverty rate for single women is a staggering 42% and it is worse for single mothers at 48%. The average wage for a full time worker living in poverty is \$9,522. Imagine \$9,522; that is less than MPs make in a month. One person cannot live on that level of income. That is less than \$800 a month and it will barely cover the cost of rent in most cities, never mind food, and we have heard about people struggling to put food on the table. How can anyone raise a family on that? Yet many single mothers are forced to make ends meet with a shoestring budget such as this.

The sad thing is women who are visible minorities have it even worse. The Statistics Canada report "Women in Canada" published in 2005 shows that poverty rates are staggering. For visible minority women under the age of 15, 33.8% live in poverty compared to women in the general population at 15.9%. That is double. Women of colour have double the rate of poverty as women in the general population.

If we look at the age group 25 to 44 years, visible minority women living in poverty is at 29% compared to the general population at 14%. Again, it is double. In total, 28.8% of visible minority women are living in poverty in this country. This is not acceptable. This is a level of abuse that simply needs to end.

As the status of women critic for the NDP and vice-chair of the status of women committee, it is my goal to work with my colleagues to ensure that women's rights are indeed addressed.

The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has made 26 recommendations to improve women's rights around the world. In order to comply with the international obligations, governments need to fund research, legislation and programs that promote women's rights. It is crucial that we work toward equality rights for women for the sake of our mothers, our daughters and ourselves. Sadly, despite all the rhetoric, we do not have equality here in Canada.

• (1310)

The YWCA released a report in June last year that outlines the dire need for a solution to abuse. There are too many women in abusive relationships and too many women dying at the hands of their spouses and intimate partners.

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Because resources are not available, many women are faced with an appalling choice: living in poverty or staying in an abusive relationship. That is a choice no one in this country should have to make. It is a choice that is causing the deaths of over 100 women every year.

By raising the minimum wage, we can take one step in the right direction. Women in an abusive relationship will not have to face the choice between poverty and abuse. They can leave, work and support themselves and their children and not have to rely on a violent partner for basic needs.

Women across this great nation deserve better. They deserve basic human rights, safety and protection.

No one should be denied this, particularly our grandmothers. Many senior women face the realities of poverty in their retirement. The poverty rate for senior women is almost double the poverty rate for senior men.

One-third of Canadians between the ages of 45 and 59 feel they are not prepared financially for retirement. These concerns are most prevalent among women, those who are widowed, separated or divorced, those who are recent immigrants and tenants, those without private pension coverage and, not so surprisingly, those with low wages.

How do our mothers and grandmothers end up living in poverty? There are a lot of reasons. Women's unpaid work makes their risk of poverty higher and results in less access to private pensions. Older women tend to have lower incomes because they live longer, which leaves them at greater risk of using up their savings as time goes by.

Immigrant women are particularly vulnerable. Many over the age of 65 who have lived in Canada for fewer than 10 years are without any income at all.

Senior women receive smaller pension incomes because of the wage difference between men and women.

Most divorced women do not claim a portion of their former spouse's pension even though they are entitled to it.

Because many retirement plans do not compensate for absences to raise children or look after sick relatives and absences are generally taken by women, these women are disadvantaged.

It is very important to emphasize here that senior women living in poverty did not end up there the day they retired. It was the poverty or near poverty in their youth that prevented them from setting aside money for retirement. That is the real source and the genesis of the problem.

By raising the minimum wage, we can take a huge step forward in preventing poverty in the future.

With the last dozen years of the Liberals cutting away at our social safety net, our working poor are at risk of being left in the poverty that we now see in retirement.

By ensuring women's rights and giving them the tools they need to fully participate in society, such as a living wage, we can take that first step in eradicating poverty in this country.

My second point is about housing. If one does not have a home, it is almost impossible to find a job and receive social assistance, to address the essential survival that housing would provide. I cannot fully pursue this topic, but we do know that there are health risks and real social consequences because of substandard housing.

My point is that there is a cycle here. One needs a home to get a job. One cannot afford a home on a low income. It gets to be a vicious cycle. It is critical that we raise the minimum wage to ensure fewer people fall into the homelessness cycle, from which it is very difficult to climb out.

More than 1.7 million households live on less than \$20,000 a year. These people do not own a home and spend more than 30% on rent.

The federal homelessness funding at this point is in limbo. I know there has been a great deal of talk about transitional funding, but there is nothing in writing. Organizations that address the needs of homeless people are in limbo. The advocates who rely on the funding cannot get people off the street if they do not have support.

We need to support this resolution. I hope that all members in the House will look at the importance of minimum wage and decent affordable housing, with a national housing strategy to address homelessness and the fear of homelessness. We need to do it. All members need to support it. It is a crisis. We need to act.

• (1315)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the subject matter before the House has to do with a national strategy for poverty alleviation. From the speeches so far, we have had an indication that there are a number of social determinants of poverty. The member mentioned women, for example. We have heard others talk about the needs of aboriginals. We have talked about youth. We have talked about seniors and the disabled and those who are not able to help themselves.

It was also said in an earlier speech that it is not possible to totally eliminate poverty as we know it. I wonder if the member would care to comment on whether or not we should seek an absolute elimination of poverty or, rather, establish realistic and achievable short, medium and long term targets to get at the root causes and get some progress made on benchmarks that we are prepared to tolerate while we get the necessary programs and supports in place.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, despite our best efforts, it is going to be difficult to say absolutely that we can end all social ills in this country, but it is important to set these benchmarks. If we do not, then we are never going to get there. It is like a marathon. We need to start to take the steps.

Clearly, we have not seen the steps that need to be taken. We still do not have a national housing program in this country. After all these years since it was cancelled in 1996, we do not have a national housing strategy, and we see 200,000 people living on the streets in this country, including children.

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We do not have a national child care strategy. That has been promised. It has been on the books since 1993. The farce that has been forwarded by the Conservative government as a strategy clearly is not doing the job. Not one child care space has been created. As well, families are now in tax season and are learning that they have to pay income tax on that \$100 they receive every month.

Along with these, there is education and there is support for seniors. All of these are components and each has a part to play. This is not something that can be done with just one response. We need to begin the journey and we need to look at all of the pieces that come into play to alleviate poverty in this country.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member. I respect and appreciate the amount of compassion that she has. In fact, in earlier days when she was an MPP, she was my representative in Middlesex county.

I really wonder, though, in terms of the hard work she did back then as a member of the provincial government, and in leaving the province of Ontario basically broke at the end of her party's tenure, what did the member's party actually do in terms of poverty issues in Ontario at that time?

• (1320)

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his recognition of the hard work done by the members of that government. I would like to say, and perhaps I have mentioned this before, that Ontario was in the midst of a recession that gripped the entire world. Interestingly enough, every time we tried to put in a remedy, the federal government, whether it was the Mulroney Conservatives or the Chrétien Liberals, found a way to undermine our efforts.

The record of that government in terms of poverty was quite significant. I remember those days. Despite the fact that there had been an affordable housing policy in place under the Liberals, very little had been done. We built 50,000 units of co-op and non-profit housing. That went a long way in terms of dealing with homelessness and the crisis families were facing.

We were a government that said no, we are not going to allow corporations to deduct lunch money at the taxpayers' expense. We said we were going to end that, but we would make sure that social assistance rates kept up with inflation and we would invest in education, both in post-secondary education and in primary education.

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this motion and to the importance of a comprehensive strategy to tackle poverty in Canada.

I would like to address the issue in the context of what is happening in my own riding of Victoria. Everyone who has visited Victoria knows that it is a very beautiful city, but they will not find the stories that I will describe today in tourism magazines.

A producer for VisionTV recently observed a city of poverty. After an absence of many years from Victoria, she was surprised at the change. She saw people "rummaging through dumpsters behind luxury hotels".

Just this morning, I read an article about a person living in a Victoria apartment where daylight shows through the wall behind the stove, which is crammed in beside the broken heat register.

Victoria city councillor Dean Fortin tells of a man he recently met who was living in a metal shed because it was all he could find for \$325, which is the shelter allowance for single people on welfare. Dean's community association is seeing 50 new homeless families per month. This is shameful.

I recently attended a supper organized by dedicated volunteers at the Metropolitan United Church, who served meals to 250 people. Judging from the comments I heard from the volunteers and from my own observation, I would say that at least 80% of those people suffered from some disability or other.

How do we explain this discrepancy, the discrepancy between these images and the story that I have heard Conservatives tell this morning, which is that strong economic growth is good for everyone? Apparently it is not.

For the past two decades, governments have been preoccupied by issues related to the global economy. They have given priority to meeting the demands of globalized markets. The interests of ordinary citizens have been trumped by the interest of ensuring higher corporate profits.

The pretext has been that the creation of corporate wealth would filter down to the rest of us, so governments have eliminated regulations to give corporations freer rein. They have entered free trade agreements that are not job based and that have not protected our environmental standards. In many cases, these agreements have neutered the power of governments to intervene on behalf of their own citizens.

Ursula Franklin wisely counsels us to follow the money to see who benefits from the policy decisions these governments have made. A report came out just in the new year and showed that since 1999 the richest 20% have received over 70% of the wealth growth in Canada. In 2005 the minimum wage increased by 4.2%, while the average CEO's salary increased by 39%.

It is not just about CEOs. The income gap between rich and poor is widening in Canada. Since the mid-1990s, and let us call them the Liberal years, Statistics Canada's most recent "Income in Canada" report shows that between 1995 to 2004 the average after-tax income of the poorest one-fifth of Canadians increased by \$400. That is not great for a whole decade when we consider inflation and cost of living. But the average after-tax income of the wealthiest one-fifth of Canadians increased not by \$400 but by \$20,000, 50 times the amount of the poorest fifth.

In my own city of Victoria, the average income was approximately \$55,000 and 60% of the households made less than the average income. One-fourth are living below the poverty cutoff and 12% of households made over \$100,000. How can these extraordinarily unjust inequalities exist in a market that supposedly works?

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● (1325)

As a social democrat, I believe that the economy ultimately must be judged by how well it serves the needs of all the people. Instead, glowing reports of the economy's performance and massive federal surpluses were funnelled to corporate tax cuts over the years, not personal tax cuts but corporate tax cuts, and those are still going down.

At a time of the biggest construction boom in Canadian history, the federal government through the Liberal years up to now have not had a national housing strategy despite the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' report of the need for such. Instead of such a strategy, because the private sector has no incentive to build affordable housing, what we have are luxury condominiums and many people and families without a decent place to live. How can we say that the market is working for ordinary Canadians?

Recently, we have seen the Canadian government replace funding of social programs with growing expenses in the defence sector. We should be asking what we are sacrificing in our society by spending our funds building up a military arsenal. Where is the political will to reduce stress on families struggling to make ends meet, to provide decent housing, to provide non-repayable grants to students, and to provide a more adequate post-education transfer?

In Victoria, we have seen the impacts of this lack of political will. In Canada, one in six people lives in poverty. In Victoria, that number is one in four. Our latest statistics for 2000 show almost 18,000 people living below the low income cutoff in Victoria. Of those, 57.6% are women and almost 2,000 are children, which is two out of seven.

One might be thinking single parents, but close to 4,000 are two parent families in the Victoria regional area who had incomes below the low income cutoff. In fact, a staggering 24% of Victoria's households are in need of core housing. That means people cannot find somewhere to live that is in reasonably good condition and is big enough for their households without spending more than 30% of their income. That is a shame.

As of 2004, there was a 23% increase in food bank use since 1997 in Victoria. As a community, Victoria has poured energy and resources into fixing these problems. We have set up an affordable housing trust, but we need the federal government and senior levels of government at the table, in partnership. That is not happening now.

The most recent report from the National Council of Welfare suggests that there is a working solution to poverty in Canada, that it is within our reach, and Canada can have the kind of success that other countries are achieving. This is not a partisan issue but it does require political will.

The National Council of Welfare report offers four cornerstones of a workable national strategy in Canada, including a national anti-poverty strategy with targets and timelines. Today's motion is about that strategy. NCW Chairperson John Murphy believes that:

—most Canadians understand how practical this is. We do it in our daily lives—if you are serious about a goal, you develop a plan to reach it, you put it in place and you assess how well it is working...There have been staggering losses in welfare

rates across the country and all welfare incomes fall far below the poverty line... Our many programs have become a tattered patchwork.

I will end by saying that today what we are doing is proposing a start because we have a prosperity gap. Precisely, the GDP goes up but wages do not and 13% of all jobs in Canada still pay less than \$8 an hour. It is time for less talk and more action, and this motion gets the battle against poverty started in earnest.

Let us go and I hope that my colleagues will support it in the spirit that it has been presented to show some leadership from this level of government.

● (1330)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, earlier in the day I gave some statistics about homelessness in Toronto and I think I erred with a couple of numbers, so I would like to repeat them with the correct numbers.

The federally funded study on the homeless in Toronto, all of whom would qualify under any definition of poverty include: 35% who suffer from mental illness, 28% are youth alienated from their families of which 70% have experienced physical or sexual abuse, 15% are aboriginals off reserve, 12% are abused women, and the remaining 10% are for a variety of causes.

These are social issues that do not get resolved with economic solutions. They require a combination. I wonder if the member would agree with the definition that individuals are poor if they cannot live in a community without being noticed.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for raising some of the root causes of the problem that are seen in Toronto. I would certainly agree with his assumption that many of these people are invisible, although I have to say that in my community they are becoming increasingly visible on our streets. Many people are standing in front of businesses or walking the streets because there are simply no homes or places for them to live.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the motion before us today is a very personal motion for me because I grew up in poverty. I know what it feels like.

I lived in a home without running water until I was 16 years of age in northern New Brunswick where it was -30° or -35° in the winter. There was frost on the inside of the walls of the home that I lived in. When I had my one set of clothes washed, I had to stand naked while I waited for them to dry. I know what it feels like. I know what it feels like to have no self-esteem until the age of 35 before that beast is wrestled to the ground.

I am so proud today that the members who are considering this are going to put their heart ahead of their wallet. The government has to take a leadership role on this issue. I believe the member would agree that if the federal government does the right thing, the provinces will follow.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his honesty and the candid expression of his own reality.

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In the past decade, with previous governments, we have seen policies that really favoured markets, corporations, and free trade, but were not job based. We have seen restraints and tax cuts. However, none of these helped low income people. It is time for the federal government to show leadership and establish a plan with targets and timelines that would tackle the problem in a comprehensive way.

• (1335)

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague talked about how Canada is a very prosperous country and how we pride ourselves on that prosperity, yet British Columbia has the second highest number of people working for minimum wage, has seen cuts to child care programs, has people living on the streets, people living in tents, and seen a decrease in access to services for women. I want to ask my hon. colleague, where does she think these people go for these services in the face of all the cuts that are happening?

Ms. Denise Savoie: Mr. Speaker, my colleague mentioned cuts to child care. It has been recently stated by the provincial government that these cuts were necessary because of the cancellation of the federal agreements. As a result, in many cases, these parents have nowhere to go. They are simply facing a shortage—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate. The hon. member for St. Paul's.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Davenport.

I look forward to the debate today on this extraordinarily important conversation about how, in Canada, we deal with some of our most vulnerable population and who, therefore, are described as poor.

We know that poor people do not live as long. We know that poor people are sicker. However, I hope that we will expand the debate today to ensure that this just is not about labelling people and using the definition of poverty, and fighting over the definition of poverty, but that this really is about all Canadians being able to look forward to a degree of income security and quality of life.

It is interesting to note that in Latin America where income security went down, poverty went up. People need to know that they will have income when they need it, but also that we will be able to deal with all of the other issues around quality of life, around housing, security and the supports and services that are needed in order to have real choices in life.

Havi Echenberg has always said that poverty is really having no choices: no choices on food, no choices on shelter. It is indeed a reason that I think we as Liberals and on this side hope that we will be able to move to income security programs that really do mean that people know their income is secure. We hope as well to move on what we established as public health goals for this country, a real approach with indicators and deliverables in terms of what actually is quality of life.

It is important, therefore, to always have real strategies, that there be realistic goals of what, by when and how in terms of how we actually deal with all the variables that affect the income security of Canadians as well as their quality of life.

I think we have to admit here on this side that we have made good strides in terms of these issues with our veterans. We have made good strides with our seniors. We have made reasonable strides with our kids.

There is one group that is particularly now vulnerable, and they are our disabled people. Persons with disabilities in our country are sometimes doubly discriminated against in terms of being single moms, being visible minorities, or being among our aboriginal people.

I guess today we would have to explain our disappointment and disgust in terms of what would have been the hope and opportunity for our aboriginal people in this country had we now been a year into the Kelowna accord instead of having it killed. People have not understood clearly the need for education, housing and health among our aboriginal people. They want to be full contributors to our society in a way that is right and dignified.

Poverty is an interesting thing in terms of what we have learned, particularly among our disabled people. Disabled people in Canada are now fighting a crisis of poverty, and that poverty differs whether it is a physical, developmental, cognitive, or mental health disability. Certain groups experience higher poverty rates; therefore, certain groups will need different strategies.

I feel that we have come a long way from David Smith's obstacles report to the member for Fredericton's task force, to the work that was begun under the then Liberal minister of social development, to understand the need for dignity, the need for full citizenship, and following the tremendous lead by the province of Quebec, the beginning of actually working toward a social economy.

As a family doctor, there was one rubber stamp that I would have loved to have had in my office for all of the forms I filled out, and that was a rubber stamp that would have said, "highly motivated—would rather be working".

I think we actually know that so many of the people in our country have had real barriers to the workplace, real barriers to being able to volunteer, real barriers to sit on committees because of a lack of accessibility, and true barriers that still exist in our society. We know that these barriers impair people's dignity and, with social exclusion, we know that this has a completely deleterious effect on people's health and well-being.

• (1340)

Employment rates are very closely linked to poverty. People with disabilities face major obstacles in entering or remaining in the workforce. The existing labour market agreements allow provinces to cherry-pick and to set targets that then discriminate against persons with disabilities. That needs to be rectified.

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We need to enlighten employers so they understand the benefit of having people of varying abilities within their workplace. It means we need to do much better on education and training. As we know, education and skills training is an extraordinarily important determinant of poverty.

We need to listen to all agencies that work with people with disabilities and educational and training resources. They need to get together in terms of their accessibility or ability to respond to people with special needs.

The potential loss of health benefits and income supports is described by Sherri Torjman in "Survival-of-the-Fittest Employment Policy". She notes that income support for people with disabilities often do not allow recipients the flexibility to earn an income and retain a basic level of support.

The subcommittee on persons with disabilities explored the CPP disability. We found that the lack of flexibility to allow people to come back into the workforce when they felt better or when they were able to participate seriously got in the way of their income level and income security. Government supports do not usually bring them above the poverty line. There is a real need for these people to have coverage for their medications and other medical supports. This need, along with others, can be a deterrent for them to enter the workforce at this time.

Gender compounds this problem. The lives of women with disabilities are very different from those of women without disabilities. Women with disabilities who are parents are more likely to be lone parents than non-disabled women. Sole support parents are one of the groups most at risk of living in poverty.

Women with disabilities have different experiences than men with disabilities. For women with disabilities, participation in the labour force is no guarantee of financial security. Typically women with disabilities earn less than men with disabilities or non-disabled women and are more likely to experience interruptions in their employment. As a result, concerns over retaining coverage for medical necessities may be more acute for women with disabilities than for men with disabilities.

I come back to the issue around income security. At the subcommittee on persons with disabilities, we heard very clearly that unless people had an attachment to the workforce, their supports and service and income security were absolutely rock bottom.

People with disabilities should not be relegated to modest welfare programs, which were designed purely for emergencies. I hope we would look forward to a real system. For instance, if we ask question whether a person can work, or if a person can work with adequate education or training and the answer to both questions is no, then we need to find an appropriate pension for these people, one that is flexible. We need to ensure that we can be creative and innovative in terms of the most vulnerable. We need then to allow provinces to take the money from a federal program and the savings they would have and move them directly into the supports and services that persons with disabilities need in order to contribute.

From homemakers, to home care, to attending care, to equipment, to transportation, medication, all those things are extraordinarily

important to the full citizen participation of persons with disabilities, taking them out of that cycle of poverty.

It is extraordinarily important that the government render the disability tax credit as a refundable so we can get a little help for the people who need it most. The \$100 million that the Liberal government had placed in the social economy to help communities build these programs was only a first step. We need to do way more.

As we move forward, good economic policy is good social policy. However, bottom-up communities will need the resources to help full citizenship for all Canadians. That is the best approach to deal with income security and quality of life, such that we do not have to talk about poverty any more.

● (1345)

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for St. Paul's made some valuable contribution to this debate, very constructive and positive recommendations. They could be part of an effective anti-poverty strategy rolling out of here today and tomorrow. It would send a message of hope and could be part of a vision for our country, one that would take us back to a time when we believed in a vision, where community mattered and people looked after each other.

I like the reference to health care because it needs to be part of this as well. Would the member and her party support a pharmacare program for all Canadians? Would she support a dental program, particularly for those most at risk and marginalized?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that we created a health care program that did not include the mouth. The most common admissions to hospital for the pediatric wards are dental abscesses. This is a problem with our most vulnerable people. For sure we need to do much better on community dentistry, particularly when learn things that we did not know. Poor dental care is the most important criterion for post-operative pneumonia. When we look at premature labour, one dental cleaning in a pregnancy can make a huge difference in terms of premature birth. Therefore I agree, we need to do away more on that.

On pharmacare, the people who are most at risk are the working poor. We have a pharmacare program that generally does reasonable well for the people on social assistance and our seniors. Unfortunately, as things get cut from the list, there is then this patchwork quilt of availability. Atlantic Canada does not have a catastrophic drug program. This is not the Canadian way. Every Canadian is entitled to the same.

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We need to look at what it would take to ensure that every Canadian has the medication they need when they need it. I look forward to working toward that.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too thank the hon. colleague for her excellent presentation on disability and her understanding of the nature of that part of society, which needs more attention.

When we speak about the minimum wage, we think of people in poverty in the workforce. We think of the many opportunities there are to slip up in the workforce when one is working for \$6 or \$7 an hour. We think of the kinds of things that can take one out of the workforce and into unemployment very quickly, things that are not in one's ability to control.

Why would the hon. member not support our aim to raise the minimum wage so people, when they are working, have a decent chance to remain working and overcome the obstacles put in their way in their daily lives? Extra dollars can make a difference.

• (1350)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, I believe raising the minimum wage is a minimum step. We have to do away more.

The federally regulated agencies, from bankers to telecom workers, are a very small segment of society that the motion deals with today.

The member for Oakville last night pointed out that even at a minimum wage of \$10, they are still not doing as well as seniors are with the combination of OAS and GIS. Also, they do not have drugs or the kinds of things that our seniors do in this day and age.

We need to work on the minimum wage, but clearly we know we have to deal with disposable income, which means that somebody must have a roof over their head. Way too many Canadians are spending 30% to 50% of their income on rent. We cannot do this just on income or we will get it wrong.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak to the motion before the House today.

Let me begin by stating, unequivocally, that I fully support the objective of ensuring Canadians across the country enjoy the highest possible standards of living. I am also fully supportive of the noble concept that workers are compensated fairly for their work and that their wages are sufficient to sustain them and their families in a lifestyle all Canadians deserve.

I must confess that I am a little intrigued by the position of my colleagues in the New Democratic Party to increase the federal minimum wage. While the principle is indeed worthy of support, it is important that we be fully apprised of the facts in this matter. If we are not clear, many of those who are listening to us would think that federally regulated workers are poorly compensated without such a minimum wage being in place.

As most members will know, the federal minimum wage was discontinued as a national figure in 1996. At that time, the minimum wage was set to correspond to the amount within the respective provinces and territories of Canada.

These facts are quite evident, and I am sure we are all aware of them. However, the members of the New Democratic Party are either being somewhat disingenuous when they criticize the former Liberal for eliminating the federal minimum wage or they are simply not aware of the facts.

Approximately 840,000 employees across Canada are covered by the federal statutes. Of the 840,000 federally regulated employees, how many of them are actually making minimum wage? The total is approximately 557. Additionally, if the federal minimum wage were raised to \$10 across the country, regardless of the province in which the employees lived, there would be 18,000 or so employees affected by this change. The reality is the vast majority of federally regulated employees are making much more than minimum wage within the province they reside. Indeed, the vast majority are making much more than \$10 an hour.

The very nature of so many of the jobs covered by the federal regulations results in a minimum wage much higher than \$10 an hour. However, I support the concept outlined in the Federal Labour Standards Review undertaken by Professor Harry Arthurs. Professor Arthurs' excellent report speaks to the issue of minimum wage and recommends this amount be set at \$10 an hour. This certainly seems reasonable in terms of ensuring a reasonable standard of living for employees who are federally regulated.

Many observers would argue that an increase in the federal minimum wage would have a negative impact on our economy. I am not one of those people. Professor Arthurs makes reference to a similar development in the United Kingdom. Despite protestation to the contrary, there was no measurable negative impact on the British economy when the minimum wage was raised to what was equivalent to about \$11 an hour Canadian.

In view of the fact that most federally regulated employees are already earning in excess of \$10 an hour, it would be safe to say that the objective of this resolution has, with few exceptions, already existed for some time.

However, I point out that should my colleagues in the New Democratic Party be so deeply concerned about the minimum wage, they may wish to speak to their counterparts like the NDP government in Manitoba where the minimum wage is \$7.66 an hour, or the NDP government in Saskatchewan where it is \$7.55 an hour, quite a bit shy of the \$10 mark.

It is interesting that the motion was brought forward by the New Democratic Party in view of its decision in November 2005 to vote with our Conservative and Bloc colleagues to end the term of the previous Liberal government. Within today's NDP resolution is a reference to aboriginal people, for example. I am sure my hon. colleagues in the New Democratic Party will recall the Kelowna accord, which was negotiated by the provinces and the previous Liberal government.

In November 2005 the prime minister at the time, the member for LaSalle—Émard, signed a \$5 billion agreement that was specifically designed to close the gap between first nations people and the rest of Canada. Upon assuming office, our colleagues in the Conservative government cancelled this agreement and in so doing ended the \$5 billion commitment as well as the dream of aboriginal people.

Statements by Members

•(1355)

As hon. members can imagine, I am quite surprised that the New Democratic Party motion refers to a prosperity gap, which the NDP members themselves helped to sustain by virtue of their decision to join with the Conservatives and the Bloc in defeating the former Liberal government.

I would also remind my colleagues in the House that in the November 2005 fiscal update by the former Liberal finance minister, the member for Wascana, there were a great deal of initiatives to assist those Canadians most in need of support. Among these initiatives was the working income tax benefit, which was designed to reduce barriers to work faced by low income Canadians. This was set to begin in 2008. This was accompanied by a \$500 increase in the basic personal amount that Canadians could claim on their income tax returns. There were also reductions planned in the lowest personal income tax rates, which would take effect up to the year 2010.

Similarly, there was \$2.2 billion over five years committed to help improve student financial assistance for Canadian students. This, of course, was also lost with the New Democratic Party decision to bring down the previous Liberal government.

I would also note that the defeat of the previous government in the House by the New Democratic Party-Conservative-Bloc alliance also ended the Liberal government's landmark national child care program, which I assume the motion before the House today speaks to in terms of the needs of children.

It would be fair to say that when we look back over the years, we can easily see that the greatest strides made for Canadians took place under the Liberal government. We understand the need to assist Canadians to have the best possible life and to take care of their families with decent living conditions and fair wages. Quite frankly, to use words from the New Democratic Party motion, the best possible national anti-poverty strategy for Canada would be to return the Liberal government to Canada.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do shake my head a bit, because it seems that even after a year, the hon. member does not seem able to accept the decision of the voters in the last election when many of us were elected to the House, that his government was defeated.

Certainly Canadians do remember that it was his government that cancelled the national minimum wage and the national housing program and many other supports for low income people. Nevertheless, I accept his genuine concern about the incidence of poverty. He and I come from the same city and I accept his genuine concern and desire to do something about alleviating poverty.

Given that only 10% of the federal workforce is covered by federal jurisdiction legislation and a review of part III of the labour code strongly recommends the reinstatement of a national minimum wage, I take it that the member, contrary to his provincial counterparts in Ontario, is supporting the reinstatement of a national minimum wage to be set at \$10 an hour.

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, this is an argument that is raised many times by many members in the New Democratic Party. I do not know when these particular lies will stop.

First, the Liberal government did not, I repeat did not, abolish the national housing strategy. That was done under the Conservative government. That was done in 1993 or 1992.

On the wage policy, from 1986 to 1996, there were no changes. By that time it would have been too late to increase it, so the government decided to go with the provincial ones.

I must say, if the hon. member is indeed concerned about this issue, because it only affects 18,000 people out of 880,000—

•(1400)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order. We will now proceed to statements by members. When we return after question period, there will be three minutes left in this particular question and comment period.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, agriculture and food production in my riding of Simcoe North represents 20% of the economy and is the third largest industry in our county.

[Translation]

I know that dairy farmers in my riding will welcome the announcement by the Minister of Agriculture that Canada will restrict imports of milk protein concentrates.

They have been very concerned about this issue for several years, and the former government did not have the courage or the determination to address it.

[English]

Even the chair of the Dairy Farmers of Ontario said, “This legitimate move to close these trade loopholes is good news for consumers, dairy processors and dairy farmers”.

This government is listening to farmers. We are taking action on the tough issues on behalf of all Canadians.

* * *

BORDER SERVICES

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to call members' attention to serious disparities in the availability of Canadian border services available to airports throughout Canada.

Across the country the customs services made available to airports by the Canada Border Services Agency differ widely from airport to airport. Some receive around the clock services while others, especially smaller airports, are only covered during certain core hours determined by the agency. If those airports receive international flights outside of the core hours, they are forced to pay for the services or pass the costs on to the airlines. Hence, they are just not able to compete with the larger airports.

The CBSA's unfair cost recovery policy places many small airports and the regions they service at a competitive disadvantage when attracting on and off season direct international flights. The policy of CBSA constitutes a major barrier to economic growth and prosperity to those regions.

Therefore, I am inviting members of Parliament from all parties to join me in urging the government to ensure that CBSA has a fair border services policy and has the sufficient funding to offer services that are reasonable, consistent and fair to all regions of this country.

* * *

[Translation]

GRAND CHÂTEAUGUAY BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on January 19, CTGC, a community television station founded in Châteauguay, celebrated 20 years of broadcasting.

Created by volunteers and artists in my riding, including Maurice Quinn and Michel and Denise Pélouquin, CTGC now broadcasts to more than 200,000 people and reaches beyond the borders of Montérégie.

The station's programming reflects the interests and concerns of the people I represent. CTGC shows us what people of different ages in western Montérégie are thinking about: the environment, health, culture and regional issues.

I am proud to salute in this House the outstanding job done by CTGC. It promotes the culture of my riding, and it is a window on our everyday lives. It carries out its mission with honour and dedication. Happy anniversary, CTGC.

* * *

[English]

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, hardrock mining is the backbone of the Canadian economy thanks to the junior exploration companies and prospectors who take the risks and go after the long shot. Yes, we are riding a boom, but the boom will not last because in all our key metal sectors we are seeing a stagnation in reserves. It is time the federal government stepped up to the plate.

Two years ago the Liberal government walked away on the exploration community when it killed the super flow-through shares program. I fought that decision then and I continued to fight until we managed to get it reinstated.

Statements by Members

I am asking for three levels of support from the government. Number one, we want long term commitment to the super flow-through shares program as it works. Number two, we need ongoing commitment to geoscience mapping like Discover Abitibi because it is an excellent partnership of industry, government and research. Number three, we need a proactive response from the government on resource revenue sharing with our first nations communities so that we can ensure that mining in the 21st century will be equitable and will include the development of all our northern regions.

Mining in Canada can work.

* * *

● (1405)

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand in the House today to recognize Barrie Hydro in its dedication to keep our community's environment clean.

Recently Barrie Hydro received a certificate of recognition award for its innovative Energy Star awareness program, a program which promoted the use of energy-saving appliances.

Barrie Hydro's latest endeavour is a project to install solar thermal domestic water heating systems. This will result in using solar thermal energy to reduce the amount of electricity and natural gas used to heat hot water. Not only will this project promote a clean environment, it will reduce the monthly utility costs among consumers by 30% to 50%. This groundbreaking project demonstrates how utilities, government, consumers and retailers can work cooperatively to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

I would like to recognize the commitment of individuals like John Olthuis and Mark Henderson at Barrie Hydro for their extensive contributions to Canada's energy conservation goals in Barrie.

* * *

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, February 16 Chief Glen Ross hosted an emergency meeting of the northern Manitoba round table at Opaskwayak Cree Nation. It was to discuss the threat to the port of Churchill and the Hudson Bay Railway by the actions of the minority Conservative government to eliminate the single desk marketing system of the Canadian Wheat Board.

The northern Manitoba round table is the elected officials representing all the first nations, cities and towns, including: Manitoba Keewatinook Ininew Okimowin Grand Chief Dr. Garrioch; Reg Meade, President of the Northern Association of Community Councils; the mayors and/or councillors of Churchill, Gillam, Lynn Lake, Thompson, The Pas, Flin Flon, Snow Lake; representatives from the Norman Regional Development Corporation and the Hudson Bay Route Association; and provincial MLAs.

Statements by Members

They are unanimous in their belief that this is more than a grain story. All communities from The Pas to Churchill rely on, and in some cases completely, the train. The Canadian Wheat Board is the single largest user of the Bay line and the port of Churchill, representing 85% of their shipments.

In its press statement, the northern round table said that if the federal government determines that the Canadian Wheat Board will cease to exist, it will be the beginning of the end for many communities in northern Manitoba.

* * *

AUTISM GENOME PROJECT

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to recognize a group of Canadian scientists led by Dr. Stephen Scherer from the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto and Dr. Peter Szatmari from the Offord Centre for Child Studies.

Funded in large part by the Government of Canada, Genome Canada, OGI and CIHR, these scientists have been working in a leadership role since 2002 with 137 researchers from eight other countries on the autism genome project.

On Sunday this group made a very significant announcement regarding the discovery of a previously unidentified chromosomal region containing autism-causing genes, findings which will form the foundation of autism research worldwide for years to come.

As the parent of a child with autism, I know the importance of this research to earlier diagnosis and treatment, which are crucial for achieving the best possible results for kids with autism spectrum disorders.

Canadians should be extremely proud of the leadership role our researchers have taken on this project. This is an incredibly important day for families affected by autism not only in Canada, but around the world. Well done.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have paraded around Quebec boasting about their meagre accomplishments over the past year. But I would like to remind them that they promised to reopen the RCMP detachments in Quebec that had been closed. We are still waiting.

During the election campaign, the Conservatives made all sorts of promises. One year later, the detachments in Quebec still have not reopened.

The RCMP is studying the impact of redeploying personnel. The office of the Minister of Public Safety is looking at how to get away with not keeping this promise. But studies are not what the Conservatives promised.

Meanwhile, the people who live near the border in the Coaticook and Lac Mégantic area still feel unsafe. The time for studies is over, because the fact is that the RCMP detachments in Quebec that closed in 2004 must reopen.

[*English*]

MILITARY VALOUR

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was privileged yesterday to attend ceremonies paying tribute to brave Canadians who were honoured during Canada's first awarding of the Star of Military Valour and the Medal of Military Valour. The Star of Military Valour ranks second only to the Victoria Cross. Many of those honoured are from the Edmonton Garrison and I have had the honour to get to know them over the past few years.

Major Bill Fletcher and Sergeant Patrick Tower were honoured with the Star of Military Valour, while Captain Derek Prohar, Sergeant Michael Denine and Private Jason Lamont were awarded the Medal of Military Valour.

The Governor General also presented 33 Meritorious Service Decorations to individuals whose specific achievements have brought great honour to their families, to the Canadian Forces and to Canada.

I think it is safe to say that this entire House and Canadians across the country are proud of these soldiers and all of our Canadian Forces and wish to say just two things, that they are our heroes and we thank them.

* * *

● (1410)

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Hon. Andy Scott (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party's renewal process continued last weekend with consultations in New Brunswick.

I was pleased to host Martha Hall Findlay, our national platform outreach chair, in Fredericton where she met with several organizations and individuals.

We co-chaired a round table on the importance of universities, research and development, regional economic development and addressing our demographic challenge. We had input from members of the academic and business communities.

My caucus colleague from Saint John co-chaired a round table on cities and urban issues, such as infrastructure, affordable housing, recreation and crime prevention.

Ms. Hall Findlay met with members of our multicultural community, along with environmental advocates and several women's organizations to hear their perspectives on policy issues.

I thank everyone for giving their time and offering many thoughtful suggestions in our policy development process.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for 17 years, the Bloc has been saying a lot, complaining a lot and criticizing a lot, but not doing a lot. The Bloc is nothing more than a privileged lobby that enjoys the salaries and social benefits of the very federal system it denounces.

Fortunately, the Conservative government has the will and ability to take action in the interests of Quebec and Canadians: Quebec's formal role at UNESCO; recognition of the nation of Quebec; funding for Quebec's green plan; the softwood lumber agreement; funding for autoroute 30; return of the land at Mirabel airport; increase of custom tariffs on milk protein concentrate imports.

Under the leadership of our Prime Minister, the Conservative team is showing that eternal opposition has its limits. The Bloc always has been and always will be unable to put an end to the centralist and paternalistic designs of the federal Liberals. Quebecers will harshly judge the inconsistency of the Bloc and its head office because, with the Conservatives, Quebec is getting things done.

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT AID

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in December, Vancouver's Stanley Park was devastated by a vicious storm that damaged 98 acres of forest, along with portions of the seawall and shoreline.

Rebuilding Stanley Park will take an enormous effort, which is why Canadians, myself included, applauded the federal government for allocating \$2 million to aid in the restoration of Stanley Park only four weeks after the storm.

In the fall of 2003, Hurricane Juan destroyed 84% of the forests in Halifax's natural jewel, Point Pleasant Park. This represents 135 acres of woodland. Three and a half years later, Halifax has yet to see a cent from the disaster finance assistance arrangements to help restore Point Pleasant Park.

When can Haligonians expect to receive treatment similar to that received by Stanley Park enthusiasts? Is this another example of the federal government turning its back on Atlantic Canadians or just another example of the government not able to see the forest for the trees?

* * *

[Translation]

SUMMER CAREER PLACEMENT PROGRAM

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last fall, cuts were made by this Conservative government without any debate or consultation. With the summer season approaching, students in Madawaska—Restigouche and elsewhere in the country are starting to look for summer employment. However, the Conservative government's cuts have eliminated \$55 million from youth employment initiatives, including the summer career placement program.

This excellent program helps young Canadians gain job experience and the knowledge and skills they need to enter the work force. The program also addresses the issue of youth exodus. Thanks to this program, students from rural areas can work in their community and save money for their education.

Furthermore, the summer career placement program provides financial support to agencies, companies, cities and towns to hire students. Without this financial assistance, it would be impossible for them to include hiring students in their budget.

Last summer, 344 summer jobs were created in Madawaska—Restigouche through the summer career placement program. Why is the government not saying anything? Why is the minister not saying anything? This is unacceptable.

* * *

NUNAVIK YOUTH HOCKEY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, 16 boys aged 11 to 13 from Nunavik in northern Quebec participated in the Nunavik youth hockey development program. This hockey program for Nunavik youth was designed to promote the importance of education and crime prevention.

Hockey is helping motivate these young people. To participate in the Quebec City international peewee hockey tournament, each player is required to demonstrate an exemplary attitude in school and on the ice.

Under the guidance of Joe Juneau, a former National Hockey League player, the boys learned the rudiments of hockey and the importance of discipline.

On behalf of all citizens of Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, I would like to thank Joe Juneau for partnering with Nunavik authorities, and I would like to offer my heartiest congratulations to these young hockey players who are giving it their all.

* * *

● (1415)

[English]

NUNAVUT YOUTH SPORTS FUND

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank one of Nunavut's busiest volunteers, Marge Lalonde, for all her efforts to enhance the lives of her fellow Nunavummiut.

In her eighties, the incredibly energetic Marge decided she would ensure that eligible Nunavut youth would be able to attend the 20th Arctic Winter Games taking place in Yellowknife in 2008 by setting up the Nunavut youth sports fund with other generous volunteers. This is just one of the many projects Marge has undertaken to make life better for Nunavummiut.

A food bank volunteer, Marge has also been an air cadet officer and is very active in the Iqaluit branch of the Royal Canadian Legion. Currently a resident of Iqaluit, Marge has been in the north since 1967.

Oral Questions

A World War II veteran, Marge joined up at the young age of 17 as part of the Canadian women's army corps attached to the signal corps.

Marge truly has made a significant contribution to life, not only in Nunavut but in Canada. I thank her for all she has done.

* * *

ANTI-TERRORISM ACT

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal Party is not a leader. His major reversal on Canada's anti-terrorism legislation has put this nation in a dangerous position. He is jeopardizing the success of the Air-India inquiry into the worst terrorist act in Canada's history. His soft on terror approach could jeopardize progress on the WHTI, at a steep cost to the economy, and he says that it is in the name of human rights.

Who would know a few things about human rights? Frank Dimant of B'nai Brith Canada does and he is calling on the Liberal leader to wake up and join this government in battling terrorism. This is what he said:

We call on [the] Liberal leader to reconsider his Party's rejection of key components of the anti-terrorism legislation.... Now is not the time for partisan politics, but for a unified, decisive and principled stance against terrorism.

A real leader knows that. Our Prime Minister gets that. The Liberal's so-called leader does not.

When will the supposed leader of the Liberal Party be a real leader and let his MPs support the anti-terrorism legislation? B'nai Brith and Canadians want to know.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration appeared before the House standing committee, and it was appalling how much she dithered on a very important question: recognizing new Canadians' foreign credentials.

Why does this government continue to do nothing to recognize the credentials of new Canadians, so that they may reach their full potential?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in its election platform, this government promised to create a new agency to help immigrants pursue their profession and their employment here in Canada. We are currently in negotiations and developing our position through consultation with the provinces, and we will be making some announcements on this very soon.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is, after all, a very important file. In 2010, 100% of the growth of our labour force will come from immigration. The Liberal government was very aware of this. It committed to investing \$263 million to help new Canadians, but this government cut those credits by 83% and was content to announce that it would spend just

\$18 million to create an agency, which has done nothing, if it even exists.

When will this government seriously address this problem?

[English]

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just answered the question. However, this is amazing coming from the leader of the Liberal Party who did absolutely nothing at all about this issue for 13 years.

In fact, when this government brought forward plans for the provincial recognition agency and new funding for immigrant settlement in the budget, that party voted against it. Shame on them.

● (1420)

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the Prime Minister were convinced that it was an important issue, why did he cut the funding? Why did he cut \$263 million?

It is the same on a relevant issue. The Citizenship Act must be updated. It is important for Canadian society. There is an amount of \$20 million to conduct a comprehensive review but the minister cut the \$20 million. That is what she said yesterday.

Will the Prime Minister order his immigration minister to stop giving excuses and get on with the job of modernizing the Citizenship Act?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the audacity of the leader of the Liberal Party never ceases to surprise me. Three times the Liberals said that they would fix the Citizenship Act and then never acted. They demand more immigrant funding. They demand we fulfill their unfulfilled promises.

This party brought forward new settlement money for immigrants and that party voted against it. That is the difference. He did not get the job done.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the truth is, the immigration minister is still scrambling to paper over the cracks in her government's immigration policy. She has no plan to help the thousands of Canadians who are discovering that they have lost their citizenship. She does not even seem to know how many there are. Let us find out.

When will the minister and the government stop improvising desperately on immigration and give us a plan?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I explained to members of the committee yesterday, we have identified over 450 people who are being subjected to the antiquated laws put in place by the previous Liberal government.

We have developed an immediate action plan to deal with each one of them, including a telephone hotline, and dedicated agents who are expediting those cases through the system. That is a lot more than the previous government ever did for those people.

Oral Questions

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, they are improvising case by case as opposed to giving us a policy.

[*Translation*]

This minority government has done nothing to address these challenges linked to immigration. It promised an agency to assess foreign credentials, but has done nothing. It promised to reduce waiting lists for newcomers, but has done nothing.

Why so many empty promises? Why do the Conservatives not have a comprehensible immigration plan?

[*English*]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Au contraire, Mr. Speaker, it is the party opposite that froze settlement. It is the party opposite that put in a new \$975 tax on immigrants.

This government put \$307 million into settlement money for new Canadians, money those members voted against. We have allowed students to work off campus to help finance themselves. We are getting the job done and those members keep voting against it.

* * *

[*Translation*]

JUDICIAL APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, over the past few days, three current and former Supreme Court judges have publicly criticized the Prime Minister's interference in the judicial appointments process. Yet the Prime Minister stubbornly refuses to acknowledge that his interventions with respect to appointing members of the judicial advisory committee are threatening judicial independence.

Why is the Prime Minister insisting on getting involved in the judicial appointments process when everyone—judges, lawyers and bar associations—is asking him to reconsider?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have heard these comments. It seems to me that the leader of the Bloc Québécois thinks that judges ought to be the ones to decide who should become a judge. That is not this government's position. We have a consultative process, a process that includes more groups now than it did before. We intend to move forward.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, he should take a closer look at the Bloc's proposals.

Instead of being so stubborn, the Prime Minister should act on our proposal and let the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights hear witnesses, like former Chief Justice Antonio Lamer.

Does the Prime Minister intend to support our proposal and postpone his decision until after he hears the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights' recommendations on the judicial appointments process?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is responsible for appointing judges and for having an appointments process. There are those who would have the judges decide who is to become a judge. That is not our

government's position. We have consultation committees that include various groups, such as police officers and victims. Perhaps the leader of the Bloc does not want to hear what those groups have to say, but we think their opinions are important to this process.

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Supreme Court Chief Justice Antonio Lamer, former Justice Claire L'Heureux-Dubé, current Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin; all these great legal minds agree with us that the objectivity of judges should be a major criterion in the selection process.

How can the Prime Minister insist on selecting judges in his own image when everyone in the legal world is trying to dissuade him? That is the issue here.

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is really going on here is that the members of the Bloc Québécois, along with their friends in the Liberal Party, are upset about the idea of having police officers contribute as part of the judicial advisory committee.

What is interesting about this is that we never hear them talk about any of the other important justice issues, such as minimum mandatory penalties for people who commit crimes with guns, getting rid of house arrest, victims' rights, or grow ops. We never hear that. That is not their strategy.

They are welcome to their strategy. They can complain about police officers every single day for the rest of this Parliament and I am sure they will get their reward on election day.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if they have so much faith in police officers, why are the Conservatives not maintaining the firearms registry, as the police are asking?

This government's former Minister of Justice said on May 8, 2003, here in this House, that judicial appointments should be reviewed by Parliament.

Could the Prime Minister stop fiddling with the selection committees by trying to select judges based on his political ideology and instead ask the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights to review the judicial appointment process?

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not quite sure exactly what the hon. member is suggesting, but the Constitution of this country is very clear that all judicial appointments are made on the recommendation of the justice minister to the Governor General.

If the hon. member is suggesting a constitutional change, then I can assume he probably accepts the Constitution the way it is and supports it completely. I am glad to hear that.

*Oral Questions***FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS**

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance originally supported the NDP's call for a banning of ATM fees and wrote a few letters to the banks. That was very thoughtful of him, but now he has obviously decided which side he is on. In his written response to our call for fairness for ordinary Canadians, who are being gouged each and every day at the ATM machines, he simply repeated the banks' position. It was a total cop-out.

Why is the Minister of Finance supporting the banks instead of ordinary Canadians? Why will he not ban these terrible fees? In fact, why will the Prime Minister not stand up and tell him not to side with the banks but to support working Canadians for a change?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I did write to the banks, as I indicated in the House that I would. I have had fairly lively conversations about the subject with the banks.

I have made clear to them that we believe in choice and competition, and certainly the credit union networks in Canada do provide that choice and competition with respect to this particular issue of non-customer use of ATM machines in Canada.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thank God he had lively conversations. Is that not great?

Meanwhile, at this very moment, people are being gouged out of their own money when they are trying to take it out of these banks. Why does he not take some action?

[*Translation*]

The banks are making record profits—\$19 billion last year. Workers have to pay money in order to access their own money at bank ATMs.

Since the minister has decided to abandon the average Canadian, will the Prime Minister demand that the legislation be changed to protect everyday people?

• (1430)

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, not only did I have a lively conversation on the subject of the banks, but also I am meeting with them in about two weeks to discuss this subject, among others.

* * *

FOREIGN CREDENTIALS

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to hurting minorities, women, aboriginal youth and the environment, the Conservative government acted ruthlessly and cut essential programs, but when it comes to implementing much needed initiatives that the Conservatives themselves have promised, like creating day care spaces or helping those with foreign trained skills, the Conservatives are dragging their feet.

Will the minister confirm in the House what she admitted in committee yesterday, which is that she has no plan to help newcomers find jobs in their professional fields?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member obviously was mistaken. If he had been at committee, he might have heard. What I actually said was that we are developing the plan, a plan that the previous government promised for many years but never delivered.

We are developing the foreign credentials office. That is what we promised in budget 2006. We hope to have an announcement soon.

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister also admitted yesterday that it is much easier to tear down than to create. She would know.

Is the government really interested in helping Canadians with their foreign credentials? Apparently cutting does not require consultation, but helping new Canadians is complicated. Why is the Prime Minister failing to deliver on his pledge to assist new Canadians? Or was this another phony promise?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been consulting at length with the provinces and the over 600 groups, regulatory bodies and post-secondary institutions involved in constructing a foreign credentials agency that will truly help immigrants get their skills recognized so we can put their talents to use here.

When it comes to the Liberal record on immigration and helping new Canadians, let us hear what one of those members said. He said, "I think I have to admit...that we didn't get it done on immigration". Who said that? It was the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have misled new immigrants by having them believe that they would quickly resolve the matter of recognizing foreign credentials. Today, the Prime Minister and his minister are hiding behind the provinces and professional associations to justify their inaction. A year has gone by and there is no concrete result.

Why has the minister not kept her promise to new Canadians?

[*English*]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one might ask why the Liberal government, in 13 years, did not keep the promise to Canadians.

We, on the other hand, have been here 13 months. We are working hard on this file. It is a priority because there is so much talent out there coming to this country that we need to be able to harness for the good of the entire country. That is why we will be having an announcement shortly.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the Conservatives came into power, the provinces were already involved. There was a \$263 million budget on the table, a secretariat was formed, and a symposium had even been announced.

What have the Conservatives done since they have been here? They made one electoral promise, one announcement in the budget and, yesterday, an announcement that they will make another announcement.

How can the minister explain to new Canadians that the Conservatives let a year slip by before taking action?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to listen to the hon. member, we would think the Liberals had already done it, and if they had, why would they be complaining that it is not done?

Let us look at what they did do while they were in power. They increased the backlog of Canadians trying to come into this country. As for applications not being processed, they increased that to 800,000. They brought forward three citizenship acts because they said there were problems, but they let every one fall off the table. They put in a \$975 tax on new Canadians.

That is their record.

* * *

• (1435)

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Tony Blair's advisor, Sir Nicholas Stern, confirmed yesterday that Canada's inaction may cost Canada a great deal, because GDP could fall dramatically in countries where nothing is done immediately to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Is this serious warning, in addition to other expert opinions from around the world, sufficient to convince the government that it must make the necessary decisions immediately and take action right now if it does not want to seriously harm the economy?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, according to the President of the Toronto Stock Exchange, if the government insists on setting intensity rules for the reduction of greenhouse gases, it will be very detrimental for Canadian businesses.

Is this government going to listen only to the major oil companies and continue to refuse to establish absolute targets for greenhouse gas emissions, when it should be setting them, according to the president of the TSX and the majority of experts?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always helpful to have the new TSX spokesperson here in this House.

We are taking action with regard to reducing greenhouse gases. This is a very important matter. We have established some very good programs for ecoenergy and ecotransportation. We are preparing industrial regulations, which are very important if we are to make real efforts to reduce greenhouse gases. It is very important to us to take action here, in Canada, so that we can improve air quality at the same time.

Oral Questions

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec, the provinces, university rectors, professors and students are unanimously calling on the government to restore transfer payments for post-secondary education to their 1994-95 levels, which would be \$5.1 billion. Students in Quebec are condemning the federal government and demanding an additional transfer of \$1.2 billion to Quebec for post-secondary education.

Does the Minister of Finance intend to follow up on this entirely legitimate demand?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows we have had lengthy consultations for more than a year now with the other governments in Canada with respect to issues dealing with equalization and also dealing with the important transfers, post-secondary education and infrastructure transfers. We look forward to the budget, to come soon, to be able to be specific in that regard.

* * *

[Translation]

TAX TRANSFERS

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the federal government plans to sign a special agreement with Ontario for health care and social assistance totalling \$400 million.

With that in mind, does the Prime Minister, who promised to correct the fiscal imbalance, plan to sign a special agreement with Quebec to compensate for its shortfall of \$269 million, which it suffered as a result of the cancelled child care agreement?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike the previous government, which is the Liberal opposition here, this government acknowledges that there is a fiscal imbalance between governments in Canada, between the federal level and the provincial-territorial level, and that we need to move to fiscal balance, which we will in budget 2007.

* * *

CITIZENSHIP ACT

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in committee yesterday, the minister said that the numbers of lost Canadians who are unaware that their status is in jeopardy were exaggerated. She claims that the number is 450 but Statistics Canada figures show that the number is as high as 50,000. Canadians believe Statistics Canada versus the minister.

Will the minister admit that she has no plan to immediately restore the \$20 million the government cut to get the much needed review of Canada's Citizenship Act back on track?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what I said at committee yesterday was that 450 people have identified themselves and registered with the department acknowledging that they may have some anomalies with their citizenship. Those are the ones who have identified themselves.

Oral Questions

If the hon. member or, indeed, any other hon. member in the House is aware of any other cases where this information needs to be clarified or special action needs to be taken, I invite them to contact the department immediately so that we can accelerate the handling of those cases.

* * *

MINISTER OF CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Blair Wilson (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last June, the human resource minister, rather than taking a cab, spent almost \$12,000 on limos and swanky hotels to attend the World Urban Forum in Vancouver. She was said to be discussing, of all things, poverty. It is unbelievable.

To add insult to injury, as the minister was busy talking she was also ruthlessly cutting vital programs for the poor and homeless.

Now in immigration, the minister continues to turn her back on the plight of some 50,000, not 450, lost Canadians and hundreds of parents who are trying to complete foreign adoptions.

Why is the minister so loose with the public's money when it comes to her own expenses, but so meanspirited—

● (1440)

The Speaker: The hon. government House leader.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister has been working very hard on behalf of Canadians and a lot more frugally than her predecessor Liberal ministers. In fact, her predecessors in the Liberal government spent seven and a half times as much as her on their personal expenses. It is unbelievable.

What is more, she is not like the member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country who, after the 2004 election, was given a taxpayer funded trip to Kabul by the Liberal government.

[Translation]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it costs \$45 a day for a government member to rent a car. However, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration preferred to spend \$6,200 for a limousine with a uniformed driver.

When will the minister stop her excessive spending of taxpayers' money? And above all, when will she restore the \$20 million she slashed from our immigration system?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there would be a lot more money to help out with the immigration system and immigration settlement if the minister's predecessors had not spent \$247,308 in the last year of the Liberal government. That is \$247,308 in travel expenses compared with \$32,500 by the minister; seven and a half times as much. Now we know where all the money went.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the high rolling immigration minister travels in style, spending \$1,440 for a two night stay in Vancouver. Meanwhile, she drags her

feet on the Citizenship Act overhaul, which is dead, the dual citizenship review, which is delayed, and plans for the creation of the foreign credentials agency are gathering dust.

Why is it so easy for the minister to spend hard-earned taxpayer dollars on herself while making Canadians fend for themselves?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is one thing that Liberal ministers did and it is something they worked very hard at, and that was spending money.

In fact, in the first quarter of 2005, this minister's counterpart spent \$96,000 on travel while this minister spent \$10,000 on travel in the comparable quarter.

In the second quarter, the Liberal minister spent \$61,410 in travel while this minister spent \$10,243 in the comparable quarter.

While we are at it, in addition to that money the Liberals spent, perhaps the members of the Liberal Party could tell us where all that sponsorship money went.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's Conservative government presented its first budget a little more than a year ago, providing Canadians with much needed tax relief, billions of dollars in tax relief, after 13 years of tax and grab, tax and spend, and tax and tax again Liberal governments.

Would the Minister of Finance please inform this House when he will present the next budget.

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I invite Canadians to continue to consult about the budget at www.fin.gc.ca.

I am pleased to advise the House that the budget will be presented on Monday, March 19.

* * *

● (1445)

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Privacy Commissioner has said:

I fail to understand how the disclosure of birth information in [Bill C-31] would contribute to protecting or improving the integrity of the electoral process.

—the only reason put forward...to justify sharing date of birth information...it enables candidates and MPs to direct messages to constituents...

Will the Prime Minister promise Canadians that in the upcoming election he will not put the interests of political parties ahead of the rights of Canadians?

Oral Questions

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when this matter was debated at committee an amendment was put forward by the opposition parties, supported by the Liberals and the Bloc, to include the birthdates on the lists that were being provided. That amendment was actually opposed by members of the Conservative government.

However, it is very important, for the integrity of legislation, that it not proceed on a multi-partisan basis and, on that basis, we chose to no longer oppose it when it came back to this House so we could maintain that multi-level party support.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, they can run but they cannot hide.

The electoral lists are not secure documents. Often, all it takes to activate a credit card is a name, address and date of birth. Now the Conservatives plan to give birthdate information to anyone who asks.

This big brother bill does nothing to protect the integrity of the voting system. All it takes is support from the government.

Will the Prime Minister take this matter seriously and scrap the peeping Tom clause in Bill C-31, yes or no?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, while this amendment did not come from the government and the government opposed it at committee, we chose to no longer do that.

However, I should make it clear that in appearing before the committee on June 14, 2006, the Privacy Commissioner did agree that the measure would not be in contravention of the Privacy Act and that it was a matter for parliamentarians to decide, which they did.

* * *

CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for five years at the United Nations, Canada has been central to the negotiation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was adopted by the UN in December 2006.

Now Canada refuses to sign the convention.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, a coalition of disabled persons' groups, as well as respected national organizations, have urged the government to reconsider its position and participate in the March 30 signing ceremony.

Why is the government refusing to join leading countries from five continents in signing this convention?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as is so often the case, that is factually incorrect.

This government is continuing to consult with provinces and territories on this important matter. We have been participating in

these discussions on the important UN convention to protect and promote the rights of the disabled from the very beginning.

The March 30 date, which looms large, is something we are working toward. We will continue to do something that party does not do, and that is exhibit flexible, inclusive federalism, which this Prime Minister has forwarded from the very beginning.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government seems to have it in for the UN. It has ignored the UN treaty on cluster bombs, the UN climate change treaty, the UN convention on the rights of disabled people and now this convention for disabled persons.

When will the Prime Minister stop taking dictation from the White House? Canadians want an independent foreign policy.

Would the minister tell us why he is embarrassing Canadians by refusing to sign this convention without hiding behind consultation. That happens before ratification.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know quite what to say to that. As I mentioned, we are of course working toward the ratification of the UN convention on the rights of the disabled. We have been very involved in the process from the very beginning.

We are very active at the United Nations in all of the discussions. If the hon. member would just calm herself somewhat and be a little more helpful she would realize that this is something that will happen. We have not reached the date yet.

* * *

HUMAN RESOURCES AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the former Liberal government negotiated \$3.5 billion in agreements with the provinces for skills development and training but as soon as the government took office funding for the agreements suddenly dried up.

The former minister of human resources testified before the committee saying that the deals were truly and fully funded but the current minister has contradicted that.

Could the Prime Minister please tell the House which of his ministers has been misleading Parliament?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is amazing that the Liberals were always just on the cusp of accomplishing things but never quite succeeded. In 13 years they never quite got to the point where they delivered on these things.

However, the good news is that my friend, the finance minister, announced that we will have a budget soon. He will be saying a lot more about all of these matters soon. I would advise my friend to be patient.

The other good news is that we will not go back to the bad old days where the Liberals cut \$25 billion out of the social safety net. We would never do that.

Oral Questions

●(1450)

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the minister seems to have forgotten is that he and the Prime Minister both voted for budget amendments that called for deeper cuts a decade ago than the balanced Liberal approach.

Today, while thousands of Canadians are losing their jobs in the auto sector, the government is ignoring older workers.

The PM told the Premier of Ontario that we would be fully funding the agreement for apprenticeship programs, literacy and workplace skills development but there is no funding.

Why did the Prime Minister break his word? Why did the former human resources minister mislead the House when she knew the Prime Minister had swiped the cash?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member has it wrong again. The government has moved forward to provide an economy that is creating jobs.

Last month alone, under the leadership of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance, the Canadian economy produced 89,000 jobs.

Right now we are enjoying one of the best economies in Canadian history. We are not just relying on Canada's excellent social safety net, made better by the Prime Minister, we are also relying on the excellent leadership of the finance minister to create this tremendous economy that is lifting so many Canadians out of poverty.

* * *

[Translation]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Canadians who have lived for the most part in this country are in jeopardy of losing their citizenship because of a shortcoming in the Canadian Citizenship Act. Some of these individuals are senior citizens.

To reassure these citizens, can the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration tell us what will happen to them, given that there is no appeal process, if a negative decision deprives them of their citizenship?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is distorting the facts just a little bit, unintentionally I am sure.

Normally, anyone who is born in Canada is, without question, a Canadian citizen and will continue to be a Canadian citizen. Unfortunately, there have been a few cases in recent years where there have been anomalies of citizenship, usually caused by people not knowing what was required of them. A child may have been born across the border in the nearest U.S. hospital and the parents may have failed to register their child back here in Canada within a time limit.

We are working on those cases on an expedited basis. Each case is getting the attention it deserves.

[Translation]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the crisis in the shrimp fishery continues to be alarming. Representatives of Quebec shrimp fishermen met with the parliamentary secretary and staff of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Can the minister announce that, as a result of meeting with people from the industry, he plans to reduce fishing taxes, reduce the cost of permits and depoliticize the awarding of shrimp quotas, as proposed by the Bloc Québécois?

[English]

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member has raised this issue with me before. We have met with the fishermen on it. It is a very serious problem for them, not only in that area but for fishermen throughout the Atlantic provinces generally and also Quebec. The price of shrimp last year dropped. They are having difficult times and we are looking at every avenue within our jurisdiction where we can help make life a little more pleasant for them.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, Sir Nicholas Stern had a valuable lesson for the Minister of the Environment. The minister had said that Kyoto would be an economic disaster, but the world's most prominent economist has condemned his defeatist attitude. Mr. Stern joined the president of the Toronto Stock Exchange, who had warned the government in December that it would cost Canadian companies more if they were excluded from the international carbon market.

Why is the minister deliberately raising the costs of meeting the Kyoto protocol targets? Why?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal member opposite and I have a fundamental difference of opinion.

We want to grow the green economy here in Canada, to create jobs with this new economy and these new innovative technologies. We want to build a carbon capture and storage regime here in Canada, not in Russia, not in China and not in India. We want to clean the air right here in Canada.

The member opposite is fixated on spending all of our hard earned tax dollars on another continent for greenhouse gas emissions that are actually never even reduced. He should be ashamed of himself.

•(1455)

CN RAIL

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the strike at CN Rail is presently going into its 11th day. The CIRB decided last night that the strike was indeed legal.

Right now there is a lineup of cargo ships in the Port of Vancouver waiting for western grains. Automakers have been forced to reduce their shifts and some remote areas are having difficulty receiving food and fuel. This work stoppage is having serious economic consequences all over the country.

Could the Minister of Labour please tell this House what status the strike is at and what his plans are at this time?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before the Canada Industrial Relations Board even handed down its decision yesterday evening, I contacted both parties to tell them that the situation could not go on any longer.

Several sectors of Canada's economy are being hard hit by this strike. Some remote areas are even unable to receive food and fuel.

I also advised the parties that we would support them by sending our top mediator to help them negotiate, but that they had only a few hours, because this Parliament was going to act and had legislation ready.

* * *

[English]

FOREIGN AID

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in May 2004 this House adopted a bill that was supposed to provide HIV-AIDS medicines to Africa. Despite this law being passed, not a single pill has reached anyone anywhere. The pain and the suffering continues as millions of people die without any action.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Did Bill Gates ask why Canada's legislation has not been fixed and what is the legacy of our country's name in the international community because this bad Liberal law has not been fixed by the government despite a year having passed?

[Translation]

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on November 24, 2006, the government issued a consultation paper, which we made public, on the issue my hon. colleague just raised. All the opinions we received from various parties were posted on the Internet a week ago. We plan to issue a report on the consultations here in the House as soon as possible.

It is important to note that no country has asked for access to low-cost medication under Canada's existing law.

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the reason no country has asked to benefit from this law is because it does not work and it will not work unless the government actually

Oral Questions

fixes it. It is no longer acceptable for the Conservatives to stand and say that it is the Liberals' problem, and they are not going to do anything about it.

What we want is some real action. We know Canadians want to contribute with this type of bill. We know that the world supports it and the minister referring to the Internet is not going to help individuals suffering from HIV-AIDS. Canadians want to make a difference so changes can happen now. Why does he not do it? We do not need to wait any longer.

[Translation]

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind my hon. colleague that the bill was drafted under the former government.

The bill deserves our attention and more than deserves the support of this House, perhaps once some amendments have been made to it.

That is why we will go before the committee and before Canadians: to get ideas on how to improve this bill so that it benefits all of Canada and the entire international community.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a Toronto Stock Exchange CEO says that an international carbon emission market is crucial and that intensity based emission reductions simply will not do the job. Europe has a carbon market. The Chicago Climate Exchange is online.

Will the government finally admit that Canada will be left behind if it does not participate in the international market, or does the minister believe that the TSX is some money-sucking, socialist conspiracy designed to destroy the economy?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, how do I answer a question like that?

Our job as the Government of Canada is to improve the environment here. Our job as the Government of Canada is not to have the cheapest solution for industry. Our job is to ensure that our air is cleaner here in Canada.

That is why we want to make these investments right here in Canada. Our job in Canada is to ensure that a green economy emerges and creates jobs, creates hope, and creates opportunity for Canadians. That is what this government is doing.

Points of Order

●(1500)

HEALTH

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last night CBC television aired a story related to the level of mercury in canned albacore tuna.

Can the Minister of Health explain to the House what action he took to protect the health and safety of Canadians on that matter?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as Canada's health minister I am committed to protecting the health and safety of all Canadians. As soon as I was informed last week of the potential risks associated with the levels of mercury in canned albacore tuna, I instructed my officials to issue an advisory in addition to the one published back in 2002.

Yesterday, Health Canada did issue that advisory informing Canadians, especially pregnant women and young children, to limit their consumption of albacore canned tuna. Light tuna is not affected by this advisory. I want to encourage Canadians to continue to eat tuna. We have acted to ensure that Canadians are safer.

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AFGHANISTAN

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when I asked the Minister of National Defence yesterday about the deployment of soldiers to Kandahar beyond 2009, he cited the Afghan compact as the rationale.

I was not asking about the Afghan compact. I was asking about real plans that national defence has for rotations until 2011. The minister previously pledged that soldiers would not have to do more than one rotation in Afghanistan. Now plans show three and four rotations.

Will the minister reaffirm his commitment to the Canadian Forces today in the House that they will not have to do more than one rotation?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I said this yesterday and on a number of other days, our military commitment is until the end of February 2009, period.

* * *

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has claimed that it supports the green economy but its every action belies that claim. For example, \$20 million in federal funding for polygeneration and carbon sequestration in Saskatchewan was cancelled by the government. Other funding for Saskatchewan remains in limbo. Some of the best science in the world on clean energy and environmental engineering is now being done at the University of Regina. The Leader of the Opposition has visited that facility.

Will the Minister of Natural Resources confirm that the government will support those projects at the University of Regina and not allow them to be poached elsewhere?

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to confirm to the House that our government is

getting the job done. Our government announced our ecoenergy technology initiative where we committed an investment of \$230 million into new technology to clean up our conventional energy.

Unlike the old government that only managed to get it into budgets and into announcements, I would like to quote the Commissioner of the Environment who said in her 2005 report, "When it comes to protecting the environment, bold announcements are made and then often forgotten as soon as the confetti hits the ground". That is what she said about those guys.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Mitch Murphy, Provincial Treasurer for Prince Edward Island.

Some hon. members: Hear! Hear!

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

The Speaker: I wish to inform hon. members that pursuant to Standing Order 128, the House shall meet tomorrow, Wednesday, February 21, 2007 between 1 p.m. and 2 p.m. for the consideration of Government Business No. 14 as printed in today's notice paper, concerning a resolution rescinding subsection 36(2) of the Ontario Fishery Regulations, 1989.

This resolution is contained in the fourth report of the Standing Joint Committee on Scrutiny of Regulations presented to the House on Wednesday, February 7, 2007.

[*Translation*]

Consequently, I invite hon. members to note that this debate will take place tomorrow between 1 p.m. and 2 p.m.

[*English*]

The hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt is rising on a point or order arising out of question period.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during question period, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration said that if the member for Mississauga—Erindale had been in committee, he would have been able to hear the answer.

I know the minister was in committee. Was she able to see that the member for Mississauga—Erindale was in committee? First, is she saying he was or was not in committee? Second, can we indicate whether an individual was present in a committee?

●(1505)

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I apologize if I caused any offence by that statement. I realize now that the member was there. If there was any offence taken, it certainly was not intended.

Business of Supply

The Speaker: That deals with the matter.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—NATIONAL ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: When the House broke for question period, the hon. member for Davenport had the floor for questions and comments, consequent on his speech. There are three minutes remaining in the time and I therefore call for questions and comments.

The hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, members may know that I was a teacher in Ontario. As such, I tried to insist that people take responsibility for their actions.

When the former prime minister announced, in the midst of the sponsorship scandal, that there would be a federal election in February of 2006, why was it not incumbent upon the government to go ahead with its child care program and housing program at that time? If these things meant so very much to the government, why was it unable to push ahead, subsequently losing the initiatives when the election took place a whole month earlier in January of 2006?

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in answering that question, I must also answer the question of the previous member from the same party, who again misled the public and the House, both on the national housing strategy and the national child care program.

Those members keep insisting that the Liberal government killed the national housing strategy, when in fact it was the Conservative government. They also keep misleading the public on who killed the national child care program.

The national child care program, which the Liberals, under Mr. Chrétien, tried to implement, was always a fifty-fifty cost sharing program with the provinces. There was no buy-in by a lot of provinces, including some NDP provinces.

However, the Liberal government under the member for LaSalle—Émard, with the leadership of also the member for York Centre, came up with a program, in consultation with the provinces. That took over a year of negotiations. It was a very successful implementation of a national child care program before the government came down.

This constant misleading of both the House and the public, that Liberals killed the program, is totally baseless. I wish the members would speak to the facts and not to innuendoes and lies.

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge my colleague for mentioning the Kelowna accord and its importance in closing the gap between aboriginal people in Canada and Canadians. Would he elaborate a little more on how that possibly could have impacted the issue of poverty for aboriginal people in Canada?

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, the agreement we had in place with all provincial governments and the aboriginal community was so important. It was an initiative that would have alleviated much of the poverty and many of the concerns within the native community. Unfortunately, that project did not go through.

This was one of the reasons why I said I supported the minimum wage issue raised by the NDP. It affects very few people who are regulated by the federal government. However, if we want to deal with the issues of poverty, programs like the Kelowna accord and a child care program would have gone long way toward alleviating that. Unfortunately, they died because the NDP decided to side with the Conservatives and the Bloc to bring the government down.

● (1510)

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe it is unparliamentary to use the word “lie”. I ask the member consider that in 1993, yes, the funding for the housing program was ended by the Conservatives, but they had an election in 1993. It seems to me that the subsequent government could have restored the funding instead of ending the program in 1996.

I ask that the member withdraw his comment, since he has made certain statements that do not reflect the absolute accuracy of the situation.

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, now that the New Democratic Party has finally acknowledged the fact that a Conservative government eliminated the national housing project, I must apologize and regret the fact that I called the member a liar.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am splitting my time with the member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

In my first speech in Parliament a year ago, I spoke of how inspiring the House could be. I talked about a moment of pure inspiration almost two decades ago. That was in 1989 when every member of the House in every party did the right thing.

Every member rose to his or her feet to support a motion by Ed Broadbent, the leader of the NDP. The motion was to end child poverty in our country by the year 2000, to make poverty history. That is what every member of the House wanted to resolve. Every member of the House, Liberals and Conservatives alike, rose to give unanimous support to the inspired motion of the NDP. That moment gave hope and inspiration to a whole generation of Canadians.

As a young activist at the time, a school trustee working to help poor children in Toronto, I was inspired. I had very high hopes then, as I worked to launch child care programs that could help so many children and families in poverty. I had high hopes that all members in every party would keep their promise and honour this commitment to the children of Canada.

I was very proud to be a member of the NDP and a Canadian. I am still very proud to be a member of the NDP because it has kept its promises. New Democrats have been steadfast and diligent. We have been tireless in pursuing the goals to make poverty history.

Business of Supply

What about the other parties, which pledged support at the time? Both parties have had ample opportunity to make poverty history. Both have been in a position of power: a Conservative majority, three Liberal majorities, a Liberal minority and now a Conservative minority.

In every Parliament we, the NDP, have been willing to support progressive policies that would break the cycle of poverty. Both the Liberals and Conservatives could have taken or supported action over the years to make good on the commitment they all made in 1989. They have had the opportunity of power in a period of great prosperity and growth in Canada, but they have failed abjectly and totally. Child poverty is a cruel reality in our country. It is a fact, it is a tragedy, it is real and it is unpardonable.

The Liberals and the Conservatives had their chance and failed utterly and totally, with no excuse. In a period of growth and prosperity, over a million children live in poverty. Thousands and thousands of children go to bed hungry. Thousands of children have fallen through the cracks of the prosperity gap. Thousands and thousands of children have been failed by the government today, as they were failed by every government since 1989.

The hardest hit are the children of single mothers, immigrants and aboriginal Canadians. These children do not have a vote. If it were not for the NDP in the House, they would not even have a voice. The NDP has been steadfast. We have been unwavering. We have fought for all the things that can break the cycle of poverty, narrow the prosperity gap and build a better future and economy. We have fought Liberals and Conservatives, and we have supported progressive policies when there was a chance of success.

Child care is one of the prime examples and it is dear to my heart. I have seen the difference it can make in Toronto in our immigrant communities, for women and for aboriginals. We can look around the world and see the difference it makes. Progressive societies that have eliminated child poverty are healthy societies with healthy economies and healthy futures.

When I stand in the House and urge support for national child care, to entrench it at last in legislation as a cornerstone of Canada, I get howls of derision from both sides of the aisle.

First, there is the shameful government response, the smug and idiotic claim that it is actually doing something with the bogus regressive tax giveaway of a few bucks a month. This smug response is based on the lame excuse that the Liberals did nothing to create new child care spaces, so why should the Conservatives.

● (1515)

We should all ask the real question, where are the spaces that people need so a single mother can get a job, pay the rent and feed her kids?

The government is dishonouring the will of the House. It is not working to make poverty history. It seems to be working to make poverty permanent. Its policies are widening the prosperity gap and leaving so many children behind.

When I stand in the House on child care, I get the same shameful response from the Liberals as they are trying to cover up their broken promises and utter failure in three majority governments. The

Liberals stand up and blame the NDP. They say it is our fault, that we defeated the opportunity for them to finally make good on child care because we were not prepared to prop up their corrupt, bloated, visionless, do nothing government forever, so we are to blame for 13 years of broken Liberal promises.

I remind the House that the Liberals only begrudgingly took action on child care when they were in a minority, when they had to pay attention at last to the NDP. The voiceless had their voice and the government had to listen.

The Liberals cobbled together a series of agreements for child care but did not bother to enact and enshrine it in legislation. Their lame excuse for doing so little so late is to blame the NDP. Blaming the NDP for the Liberals' failings is like blaming the children who go to bed hungry. What kind of hypocrisy is that and what craven cowardice? Enough excuses already.

Before anyone on either side of the aisle rises to debate this motion and hauls out shameless excuses, he or she should try to listen to the voiceless, the children who are victims of the prosperity gap. They are the ones who live in poverty in a prosperous country like ours.

I ask every member of the House, can he or she truly accept child poverty? Can he or she sleep comfortably knowing his or her own children may sleep comfortably but knowing there are millions of other children who live in poverty? Can he or she sleep comfortably knowing he or she has failed to deliver when he or she had the chance?

I dare every member of the House to insult the House and get up and spout the lame talking points that I hear so often here. I dare Conservatives to dishonour the House by claiming progress on child care, because such claims show contempt for the House and for Canadians and for the heartbreaking number of children who live in poverty. I dare the Liberals to get up and blame the NDP to cover up their total failure in government.

I am ready for hon. members to accept the dare, but I also welcome every member to take up the challenge, to join forces with the NDP on this, to show some sense and some basic decency. I challenge all members of Parliament to support this motion and to work with the NDP earnestly and sincerely to make poverty history and to earn the right to sleep at night knowing that we are working to ensure that no child in this country goes to bed hungry.

Every member of the House can do that if he or she has the decency, if he or she has the courage, if he or she has the vision and if he or she has the heart. We can start here and now by giving unanimous support to this crucial step forward. Join me and vote for this motion. I challenge the House. Every member of the House bears responsibility when a child goes to bed hungry.

Business of Supply

Every member has a chance to honour the past commitments of Parliament to the children of this country. Let us take the chance. Let us listen at last to the voice of the voiceless, the hungry child who should haunt the House. Let us change history and let us start now.

• (1520)

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

Pursuant to Standing Order 83(2) and further to the announcement which I made during question period about the date of the budget of Monday, March 19, 2007, I should specify the time, which will be 4 p.m. on that day.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member does know that the Liberal Party announced right off the bat that it is supporting this motion. The intent of the motion is to address the national shame of poverty in Canada. We believe in social justice.

We also agree that a federal minimum wage, which would only apply to about 18,000 workers in Canada, is only a small step but it is reflective of the value which this Parliament should hold and show to the provinces so they will make those changes.

The hon. member speaks a lot in this place about child poverty. I have yet to run into anybody in Canada whose heartstrings are not pulled when one talks about child poverty. The reality is if there is a child who is poor, that means there is a family that is poor. We really should be talking about the conditions of the Canadian family.

I am going to ask the hon. member a question I asked her a long time ago. I want to see whether or not she can put it in the context of poverty. The hon. member knows very well that lone parent families represent about 15% of all families in Canada, but they account for some 54% of all children living in poverty, the 1.2 million children she referred to.

We cannot legislate behaviour, but we do have to make conditions in which families in Canada can be strong. Strong families make a strong country.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, in 1995 when the then Liberal government cut off a huge social transfer and in fact eliminated the entire program of the transfer in block funding format, what occurred is a large number of provinces across the country cut the welfare rates for a lot of single mothers.

A single mother cannot work because there is not enough child care. She has to stay home to take care of her kids. Yet, when the welfare rate is so low and we have laws that allow deadbeat dads not to pay support, what we see in Canada is a lot of single mothers trapped in a cycle of poverty.

In Toronto there have been surveys and polls done on single mothers who live on welfare. The polls have tracked these mothers for five years. They are in fact stuck in a cycle of poverty. What is interesting is one-third of them have university degrees. Many of them cannot get back to work because they do not have child care support. Some of them are depressed because they are stuck. They want to work but they need someone to take care of their kids, which is why we absolutely have to have a national child care program, so that mothers who want to go to work are able to do so.

If they choose to stay home to take care of their kids, then there really should be a living wage so that the welfare rates would be high enough so they would not have to face the awful choice of having to feed their kids or pay the rent.

• (1525)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise on this NDP opposition motion, which basically calls on the government to take action on the growing prosperity gap in Canada that we know is making it harder for working and middle class families to make ends meet. We are seeing more and more Canadians, women, children, seniors, aboriginal people and people with disabilities slipping into poverty. Therefore, with this motion, we are calling on the government to implement a national anti-poverty strategy, beginning with the reinstatement of the federal minimum wage initially set at \$10 an hour.

This is following 15 years of failed economic policies in this country. We have seen the decline in the overall economic well-being of most Canadians. In this corner of the House we actually see things as they are, perhaps because New Democrats are more in touch with their communities. We see the growing number of homeless in the country. We see the growing lines at the food banks.

Under the Liberal watch, the lines at the food banks grew. Poverty grew. Homelessness grew. Under the Conservative watch now we see no action being taken to deal with the poverty crisis that impacts Canadians from coast to coast to coast. Talk about failed economic policies. We are talking about failed economic policies and rich corporate lawyers and CEOs. Unbelievably there have been record profits with billions and billions of dollars in profits in the bank sector and in the petroleum sector. There are unbelievable levels of profit while most Canadians are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet. The figures are compelling.

Since 1989, 80% of Canadian families have seen a decline in real income. We in the New Democratic Party come to the House day after day and see the Conservatives and Liberals slapping each other on the back saying there is unbelievable prosperity in this country. They cheer the fact that 80% of Canadian families are worse off than they were 15 years ago.

The Conservatives and Liberals rejoice because they are doing all right. Their parties are composed of corporate lawyers and CEOs so of course they have absolutely no idea what is happening on main streets across the country. They have no idea of the erosion of the middle class. They have no idea of the erosion of quality jobs in this country since 1989.

Business of Supply

Let us look at the figures. The Liberals and Conservatives look at the surface and say, "Wow, the average growth has been about 4% for average families in the country". They think that must be a good thing, but not a single Liberal or Conservative member of Parliament in the last 15 years has looked beyond that so-called average. We have to understand that if a billionaire makes another billion and a thousand people get poorer, that still averages out as more people being rich, but that is not the reality. One has to go beyond the average figures. These are the results, as devastating as they are.

The poorest of Canadians, those families that are earning less than \$20,000 and are below the poverty line, have actually seen since 1989 an erosion in their real income of 9%. They are earning nearly 10% less now than they were 15 years ago. It is unbelievable but true. How members of Parliament could stand up and say that we have prosperity in this country when the poorest of Canadians are earning 10% less than they were in 1989 simply goes beyond my capacity to understand where those members are coming from.

Let us look at the second lowest level, families earning between \$20,000 and \$36,000 a year. That is 20% of the Canadian population and they have lost about two weeks of income a year. Their income is 5% lower in real terms than it was in 1989. They are earning two weeks less of salary a year than they were in 1989. And the other parties rejoice with the so-called prosperity. I guess they are going to the wrong cocktail parties because on the main streets of the country people are poor.

Let us look at the third level, another 20% of Canadians, those earning between \$36,000 and \$56,000 a year. They as well have lost an average of two weeks of income. Their salaries are 5% lower than they were in 1989.

• (1530)

The bottom 60% of Canadian income earners, the bottom 60% of Canadian families, have seen what many consider to be a catastrophic fall in income.

What has happened to the very wealthy?

The very wealthy, the families earning more than \$86,000 a year, and that includes members of Parliament as we well know, certainly Liberal and Conservative MPs, have seen their incomes skyrocket. Their family incomes in real terms have gone up over 12%.

What has happened is worse than a prosperity gap. It is a prosperity gulf, where what we see in communities across this country is working families having to work harder and harder for less and less. During that same period, overtime has gone up over a third.

Most jobs that are created today do not come with pensions. In fact, the number of jobs with pensions has declined and is now a little over a third of the overall percentage of jobs that are created. Most of the jobs that are created do not come with the benefits that we used to have as part of our societal compact. Most jobs do not come with benefits. Most jobs are part time and temporary in nature.

So when the Conservatives and Liberals rejoice over the employment figures, they are rejoicing over Canadians getting temporary or part time jobs to survive, jobs with no pensions, jobs with no benefits, and jobs that pay less than they did 15 years ago. It

is a catastrophic erosion of the actual ability to survive for middle class and poor working families, and the Conservatives and Liberals have done absolutely nothing to deal with it.

In this corner of the House, we have been putting forward strong policies. NDP members believe in an industrial strategy that actually leads to the creation of good jobs. We believe that we should not simply be giving up our manufacturing base. That is why yesterday we spoke in the House about saving textile jobs. We fought tooth and nail against the egregious softwood sellout that has led to 4,000 jobs being lost in a matter of weeks since it was forced through on October 12.

The NDP is the only party in the House fighting to help middle class families keep their heads above water.

It is about more than that. It is also about establishing a minimum wage that makes sense. It is about bringing up the federal minimum wage so that we can actually start to have working poor who have an adequate salary and who can actually raise their families and live in their communities.

It is no secret why we will have nearly 300,000 Canadians sleeping in the parks and streets of our nation this very night. It is because of laissez-faire economics, failed economic policies, and completely reckless and irresponsible social policies. They started under the Liberals and continued under the Conservatives and they say that we have absolutely no responsibility toward our fellow Canadians. We do.

I am going to say a little about people with disabilities. Half of the homeless in this country are Canadians with disabilities. Forty per cent of those who rely on food banks to make ends meet are people with disabilities. Over a third of families with disabled children are families living below the poverty line.

The very poor in our society are people with disabilities. That is why the NDP convention last September called for a comprehensive disability strategy that would include disability supports to integrate people with disabilities into the workplace and supports for people with disabilities so they can live at an adequate level of income. The NDP has been pressing in force as well for Canada to be the first country to ratify the UN convention on the rights of people with disabilities.

Canadians with disabilities deserve rights in this society. The NDP in this corner of the House will continue to fight until we have an anti-poverty strategy in this country and until we have a Canada that leaves no one behind and where everyone can live in and contribute to society.

Business of Supply

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the hon. member's presentation with interest. It seems that he has quite a seething anger toward corporate entities in Canada and a lot of difficulty with all of the successes they have had in employing so many Canadians. There were some 89,000 new jobs created this year.

I wanted to inquire into what economic policies he might bring about should he ever achieve power in Canada, although hopefully that will not occur. I was wondering if he wants to go down the road of Hugo Chavez in South America, where we see the nationalization of practically every corporation in that country. It seems that this might be his approach.

• (1535)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I really regret that the Conservatives are not taking this debate seriously. That was a laughable statement. When 300,000 Canadians are sleeping out in parks, I think the Conservative members should at least have the decency and humanity to take a debate like this seriously.

They have not bothered to look at the figures. They have not bothered to look at what is actually happening to the middle class and the working poor in this country. They have not bothered to even ask the question. They are too busy going to cocktail parties and enjoying meeting with lobbyists to actually understand what is really happening on main streets across this country. That is extremely regrettable.

I will keep repeating this for the hon. member until he understands. What I mentioned was that these employment figures are part time and temporary jobs. There is no stability for family sustaining income. There is no ability for those families to actually raise their kids. We have seen an erosion of real income for Canadians.

I think it is absolutely inappropriate for the Conservatives to laugh off poverty and to laugh off the erosion of the middle class and the struggle Canadians are having to maintain their level of income, the struggle against seeing their level of income continuing to decrease. When they have to choose between the banks on Bay Street and the gouging that takes place with automatic tellers and the main street Canadians who are having a hard time struggling to make ends meet, I think it is deplorable that the Conservatives choose their Bay Street buddies every single time rather than siding with real Canadians and standing up for Canada. That is deplorable.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member spent a little time talking about income levels of Canadians. I am pretty sure he will agree that it is important that people are successful in this world, because successful people are job creators. Job creators do help those who need jobs, especially those in low income situations.

Could the hon. member explain to the House how we link what an executive of a corporation makes to a strategy for poverty alleviation? Is the hon. member suggesting that somehow we should just reduce executive salaries and it will solve the problem?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I regret that the Liberals are not taking this debate more seriously as well.

We have seen CEO salaries and benefits skyrocket. These are the same people who come before parliamentary committees and say that we really have to reduce corporate taxes and let us do it even more. We cut back on health care, access to post-secondary education and income sustaining programs, and we do not provide anything for aboriginal peoples or persons with disabilities. Let us just cut corporate taxes.

Of course, what do we see? We see Conservative government and Liberal government budgets that continue to lower corporate taxes, far beyond even what our competitors in the United States have deigned to do, and sacrifice everything else. Corporate taxes continue to come down. Canadians continue to have a harder struggle.

The reality is that what we actually need is a balanced policy that allows corporate taxation to be at an effective level to provide for the health care and the education programs Canadians need. The health care we provide is actually a huge benefit to the corporate sector. PricewaterhouseCoopers studies show that Canada is more competitive because our health care helps subsidize the same corporate interests that want us to cut taxes all the time. I hope the hon. member reads that report.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today in response to the motion from the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie. I would like to also advise you that I am splitting my time with the member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex.

Canada's new government recognizes that aboriginal people in this country face unique challenges in overcoming the poverty in which too many of them still live. Consequently, in collaboration with our aboriginal partners as well as the provinces and the territories, we are implementing a new approach to resolving these challenges, an approach in which we work with first nations, Inuit and Métis to develop a better quality of life for them and the hope for a better future for their children.

There are four main components of our approach.

We are directing investments toward housing and education, empowering individuals to take greater control of and responsibility for their lives.

We are also working to speed up the resolution of land claims. The settling of claims provides certainty for investment and encourages the economic development opportunities that allow communities to grow and flourish. Of course, we have seen over the last decade and a half that land claims unfortunately have grown in number from just over 200 to nearly 1,000. Clearly this is something that the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development is working diligently to rectify.

Business of Supply

Our third point is that we would like to have the government promote economic development, job training and skills and entrepreneurship for first nations, aboriginal people, Métis people and Inuit people all across Canada. As we know, we have seen a strong affinity among aboriginal people for the area of entrepreneurship. Aboriginal people would like to provide for their own families themselves and the best way to achieve this, of course, is through their own entrepreneurial ways.

We also are going to lay the foundation for responsible self-government by moving toward modern and accountable governance structures. This point is perhaps the most important. We have seen a very antiquated Indian Act govern the lives of first nations people. Unfortunately, it is a broken system. It is a broken system that the previous government did nothing to rectify. It is a broken system that all the opposition parties, unfortunately, just seem to want to throw more money at. Thankfully, our government is choosing to proceed in a new way.

By working with our aboriginal partners to implement this approach, we are creating the conditions for the healthy, sustainable communities of the future. These are the best means to combat poverty. Of course, improvements in one area can only result in positive benefits in all these areas.

Furthermore, we have shown that we are willing to back up our efforts with real resources sanctioned by Parliament. In budget 2006, Canada's new government announced \$450 million over two years to fund initiatives in education, in support for women, children and families, for water on reserve, and for housing as well. The budget also included up to \$300 million for housing for aboriginal people living off reserve and up to \$300 million for housing in each of the three northern territories.

We have made progress toward our goals, improving the quality of life of aboriginal people and ensuring that they enjoy a standard of living comparable to that of other Canadians.

For instance, soon after the government came to office, we learned that more than 200 first nation communities had drinking water systems that were classified as high risk or worse. To address this issue, the minister, with the Assembly of First Nations, appointed a three member expert panel to provide legislative options for safe drinking water in first nation communities.

On December 7 last year, the minister tabled in the House the expert panel's findings and recommendations, along with a report that outlines progress made on all aspects of the government's plan of action. This includes the removal of several drinking water advisories, improvements to a number of water development treatment plants, and increased assistance in training for plant operators.

We are also working toward providing aboriginal women, children and families with the support they need to contribute to prosperous, stable communities. Part of the support is the resolution of the difficult issue of matrimonial real property on reserve.

In collaboration with the Assembly of First Nations and the Native Women's Association of Canada, consultations and dialogue sessions have taken place across the country in order to determine how best to address the legislative void presented by the current state

of matrimonial real property on reserve. These consultations and dialogue sessions have now been completed. The process is currently in its third and final phase.

● (1540)

This is the consensus building component of the initiative during which the ministerial representative will develop a final report reflecting the outcome of the consultations and will submit recommendations for action to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

Moreover, the government recognizes that one of the keys to improving quality of life is through economic development and increasing aboriginal participation in Canada's economy.

Aboriginal people are now enjoying unprecedented access to venture capital, business supports, and training and educational programs. Mainstream businesses are eager to partner with aboriginal groups. Many aboriginal communities across this country are ready and more than willing to seize these opportunities.

We are working with our partners to ensure that first nations, Inuit and Métis can take advantage of current circumstances. We are also working to encourage aboriginal youth to pursue careers in business, sciences and the skilled trades.

There is no doubt that genuine progress is difficult. It requires clear thinking, diligent effort, patience and collaboration, but also leadership.

Canada's new government will continue to work in concert with our aboriginal, provincial and territorial partners to achieve this progress. Together, we will create practical solutions. We will allocate appropriate resources, and establish clear roles and responsibilities, but above all in setting the goals and in working toward achieving them through our leadership.

I am very proud to be part of this process. We are going to continue to support initiatives that will alleviate the poverty that is endemic to too many aboriginal communities. By improving quality of life through addressing real issues, such as drinking water, matrimonial real property and educational opportunities, as well as economic development, this will encourage communities to grow and prosper, and we will continue to support them in this area.

● (1545)

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member mentioned all the flowery things and it sounded like a very good speech, but on the ground, that is not the reality.

Northern Ontario, in which my riding of Kenora is situated, has some of the most dramatic situations that need to be dealt with, and they need to be dealt with a positive influence.

He mentioned the drinking water issues and the expert panel that travelled across Canada. I would like to ask him how many spots in remote sites this panel visited? We have quite a number of remote sites across Canada; there are 21 in my riding. In fact, did the panel visit any small first nations communities in northern Ontario?

Business of Supply

I know it is a huge issue because we deal with not only the problem of the small remote sites but the long distances and the huge costs that are incurred. If we talk about quality of life and how we want to improve things, we have to get off the beaten track.

In fact, when the parliamentary secretary travelled to my riding recently, I believe, and he can correct me, he stuck to the main Trans-Canada Highway and did not even leave it. So, if we want to find out what is happening in the communities, we have to get to the communities. I am looking forward to the day he can tell me what he is going to do for the communities in northwestern Ontario.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Mr. Speaker, it is true that earlier this year I did have the pleasure of travelling through the Kenora area and had the pleasure to meet with a number of first nation communities that have many real issues that, unfortunately, have piled up over the years. The community of Pikangikum, which he is very familiar with, met with me on one occasion and presented a number of issues, not only dealing with water but dealing with quite a substantive electricity power grid issue.

Unfortunately, over the previous tenure of Liberal governance, this community was put by the wayside due to a disagreement that it had with the former minister, who resided there. Unfortunately, this pettiness left this community in the dust. Thankfully, our new government's approach is not to engage in such petty punishments for a disagreement. In fact, we are looking forward to assisting the people of Pikangikum.

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I come from the riding of Surrey North, where there are a fairly significant number of urban aboriginal people, as well as many other people who are feeling the growing prosperity gap in terms of not being able to have affordable housing, not seeing a future for their children. We have a very overcrowded hospital at Surrey Memorial Hospital. It is one of the busiest in the province.

I would like to know how the member would respond to far more people living in poverty and what that will do to our crowded hospitals, given that we know that people in poverty use hospitals more and use the health care system more? What is his position on how that will affect future health care and the use of our already overcrowded hospitals?

• (1550)

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Mr. Speaker, I think the member's question perhaps allows me to speak to the philosophy that I personally bring to government and that is that government cannot create economic prosperity. Government can simply create a foundation for which businesses can achieve business and prosperity.

Economic prosperity is delivered through the private sector. It creates the jobs. By creating an environment that supports our business community, by creating an environment that actually sustains and grows the economic footprint that our private corporations have in Canada, this will bring about more employment for people who currently do not have jobs and more economic development in areas that need it.

That is the approach that I would take to governing in Canada. I know that our party has that viewpoint, to get out of the way of the private sector. Too often in government we think we can cure every ill that is out there.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in the debate on this motion. Poverty is a complex issue for governments to deal with. It is much simpler for individuals who have to deal with it in their daily lives. For them it often comes down to survival. We as Conservatives in the new government recognize that life in today's Canada has to be much better than this.

The new government understands the need to take action on poverty. While we have a remarkable economy and 30 year highs in employment levels, we like all members of the House, want to ensure that all Canadians share in the benefits of this strong economy.

Canadians believe in people. Believing in people means helping our neighbours. Lending a hand is of tremendous importance to Canadians. This is especially so in my riding of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex and in rural Canada in general.

One of the things I have noted in following the debate is how little attention is being paid to rural Canada in the discussion of this motion. Rural Canada counts for a significant amount of the nation's wealth yet we still face our challenges. Perhaps it is because rural Canadians bear their burden with a quiet dignity and are often overlooked.

This motion touches on issues which affect rural Canadians also. Thank goodness the new government did not wait for motions like this to be debated before it began to take action.

It is important to acknowledge the work of Senator Segal just down the hall. He has observed that it is necessary for all levels of government to work together to address this issue. He calls for strategic investment, regulatory modernization, and labour force development to provide rural Canadians, especially those in the agriculture sector, with opportunities to take part in Canada's long term prosperity.

Rural poverty is something that needs attention. Poverty in rural Canada and indeed rural Canadians generally were ignored over the past 13 years of Liberal government. Liberals sat by and did nothing as BSE forced farmers into bankruptcy. They watched as CAIS was failing farmers.

Perhaps the most memorable thing the Liberals did in rural Canada was not for farmers but to farmers, where they jailed those who were simply looking to make a living by selling their grain. That is not a plan to combat poverty.

Conservatives and the new government understand that addressing the challenges of rural poverty requires thinking that goes beyond the mandate of a single ministry. This is a challenge that calls for a collaborative effort.

Business of Supply

The Prime Minister and the new government are taking steps to get out of the silos that are sometimes built around programs and institutions. For instance, we have a rural secretariat which is situated in the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food but which works alongside other federal departments and with our provincial partners. The secretariat is helping to develop a more comprehensive understanding of issues concerning rural Canadians including poverty.

It is easy to allow walls to be built around departments. It takes real leadership to recognize those walls and break them down. That is what we have in this Prime Minister. The government is breaking down the walls between programs and policies that affect rural Canadians be they economic, social, environmental or cultural.

We want a government that recognizes the needs of rural Canadians. More importantly, we want a government that takes action when it is required. I would like to take a moment to look at what Canada's new government has been doing to address rural issues and poverty.

The government brought an end to the decade old softwood lumber dispute. Rural communities rely on industries and natural resources. In fact, one-third of Canadians are employed in industries that are directly or indirectly related to resources. Under the new government rural Canadians are seeing over \$4 billion in tariffs returned to Canada.

Budget 2006, which the Liberals and the NDP did not support, included measures for the government to help Canadians through international pressures and disruptions of their livelihood.

We have worked with the United States to loosen trade restrictions on Canadian cattle after the BSE crisis. We have removed the tax liability faced by fishers when they transfer their fishing property. We have committed an additional \$2.2 billion over five years to the municipal rural infrastructure fund.

• (1555)

Canada's new government also took action against poverty by reducing taxes and by other budget measures that leave more money in the pockets of Canadians, especially low income Canadians and rural families.

We cut the GST by 1%. We reduced personal income tax, improved credits for low income Canadians and look forward to more tax relief in a few weeks when our budget comes down on March 19.

We are delivering choice in child care through the universal child care benefit which provides families with \$100 per month for each child under six so that parents can make the decision on how they want to look after their children.

We have invested in skills and education by providing a tax credit to employers who hire apprentices and through grants to first and second year apprentices. The Liberals opposed each of those, as did the NDP.

The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food made changes to the CAIS program and these changes are welcomed by rural Canadians. As a result, over \$950 million are being returned to the pockets of

producers. We implemented a crop protection program to help farmers affected by the flooding in 2005 and 2006.

The minister introduced a two year pilot project for low income farms and farm families that will help rural families in need with the tools to earn a better living on and off the farm; 1,400 producers and over \$130 million has gone out.

Rural Canadian agriculture producers are able to face down poverty as a result of this government. Over \$5 billion in government support will find its way to producers before the end of this fiscal year.

The importance of rural Canada to all Canadians is clear. Canadians are pleased to see a government that shares their views on what is important. Canada's new government is working hard to fight against poverty in Canada.

We are taking action for those on our farms, those in our small resource communities, those living on reserves and those in our cities. I am proud to part of a government that is doing so much to fight poverty in rural Canada.

One level of government cannot do it alone. Indeed, governments cannot act alone. We need provinces and local governments. We need those living within our communities to take part in the solutions.

Together we can make a tremendous difference. Together we can work to ensure all citizens, rural, urban, aboriginal and new Canadians, build Canada's prosperity and take part in that prosperity.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in his deliberations, the member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex mentioned child care and said that poverty was a complex issue. When it comes to child care and early learning, it can also cripple the family budget when it comes to low income rural families.

When I look at the last budget there was only one tax bracket that was taxed and that was the lowest tax bracket. Their taxes were raised by 0.5%. When I look at child care and early learning, this will be important for generations to come.

We signed landmark agreements with the provinces and territories. I was travelling through British Columbia in the rural communities and small communities. Taking away those agreements on the subsidized day care and early learning centres will have a large burden on families from a rural background who are the lowest income families.

I can give a perfect example. My son turned three years old yesterday and it will cost me \$1,000 to send him to early learning. I was just wondering how the \$100 before taxes will help the families in the rural areas.

Business of Supply

•(1600)

Mr. Bev Shipley: Mr. Speaker, I know the member's concern and his passion about people living in poverty.

I want to talk to him a little bit about the universal child care program that is for everyone. It is \$100 a month for every child under six. That reaches out to every family, regardless of their status in Canada, regardless of their financial situation. It allows, what we believe in this country, the fundamental basic values of families where they make the choice of child care, not those in institutions hired by bureaucracies to run them. We believe in families.

I also want to help out a little in terms of the last budget. In our last budget there were \$20 billion in tax cuts over the next four or five years and 650,000 people off the tax rolls. That is amazing. That is what we are doing as the Conservative government to help out those on low incomes.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member's comments. Canadians do want to help each other and they often step up to the plate to help their neighbours who are suffering from a temporary job loss or in many other ways. In fact, it was exactly that kind of national will that started the food bank programs across Canada in the late eighties. The people who created these food banks thought of them as a temporary measure to help their neighbours through a particularly difficult time in the economy.

What do we see now? Food banks have become institutionalized in this country. The people who line up week after week include the disabled, the elderly and people with mental illness, and that is not right.

In 1989, when many of the current members were in the House, the House agreed to end child poverty. I want to ask the member what programs he thinks government could bring in to alleviate poverty in the country and to really help our neighbours rise above the poverty line?

Mr. Bev Shipley: Mr. Speaker, in the time I have I will reiterate what the Conservative government did in the last budget, which the NDP did not support and which really surprised me. We had tax cuts for the most vulnerable, those with the lowest incomes, and that took 650,000 people off the tax roll. Those are not the people at the top end. Those are the folks at the lower end who have low incomes.

We did more in one budget to help the poor in the country than the last government did over the last four or five years.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Acadie—Bathurst.

I will begin by honouring the member for Sault Ste. Marie for his tireless efforts in bringing this motion before the House and the amount of work he has done from coast to coast to coast in terms of trying to raise the awareness of all around the matter of poverty.

I will speak specifically about poverty for first nations, Métis and Inuit peoples and I will begin with the Assembly of First Nations' "Make Poverty History" campaign. It has a first nations plan for creating opportunity. Its campaign lays out some pretty desperate statistics.

Someone from Save the Children, an international organization, recently came to Canada and visited two communities in northern Ontario. The person looked at the desperate situation around housing, water and access to education for many people on first nations reserves.

The Assembly of First Nations talks about the shocking reality of first nations poverty and provided a couple of statistics. It talked about the fact that one in four first nations children live in poverty in Canada compared to one in six Canadian children and that suicide accounts for 38% of all deaths for first nations youth aged 10 to 19.

With regard to housing, first nations homes are about four times more likely to require major repairs compared to Canadians homes overall. Nearly 1 in 30 people live in homes with no hot or cold running water, no flushing toilets, and 5,486 of the 88,485 houses on reserve have no sewage services. About one in three first nations people consider their main drinking water supply unsafe to drink.

With regard to communities, applying the United Nations human development index would rank first nations communities 68th among 174 nations.

The statistics are grim. What we see is decade after decade of report after report that talk about exactly the same kinds of issues. Surely by now parliamentarians would be weary of hearing about the reports and be moved to action.

The Assembly of First Nations is actually moving itself to action because it is tired of waiting on parliamentarians. On Friday, this document will be made public. National Chief Fontaine and the Assembly of First Nations have put together a campaign entitled, "The \$9 billion Myth Exposed: Why First Nations Poverty Endures". This document, which will be public on Friday, states:

Where is the \$9.1 billion being spent?

Only \$5.4 billion of all federal "Aboriginal" spending actually ever reaches First Nations.

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada Department officials have confirmed that only about 82% of policy and program funds actually reach First Nations in the form of grants and contributions. Treasury Board estimates that 11% or \$600 million per year is spent on INAC departmental overhead.

It is estimated that only about 53% of "aboriginal issues" funding from other federal departments actually reaches First Nations. This issue requires further study.

The document goes on to talk about why first nations are still living in poverty:

Business of Supply

The federal system of fiscal transfers to First Nations communities is broken. Quite simply, funding cuts to First Nations programs and services over the last decade have made impoverished conditions much worse. First Nations communities have to provide more programs and services, to more people, with less money every year. The result is that the poverty gap has been widening further every year.

Due to the 2% cap on core services that has been in place since 1996, the real purchasing power of First Nations has steadily decreased due to annual increases in population growth and inflation. The total purchasing power lost by First Nations communities since 1996 is now 23 cents for every dollar, and we are losing more every year that the 2% cap remains in place.

Further on in the release, National Chief Fontaine talks about the fact that the first nations population is growing at a much faster rate than Canada as a whole. More than half of first nations people are under 23 years old. Freezing their budget at a 2% to 3% growth rate means that first nations governments cannot keep up with the demand of their growing population.

The Auditor General has recognized the fact that Indian and Northern Affairs Canada funding increased by only 1.6%, excluding inflation in the five years from 1999 to 2004, while Canada's status Indian population, according to the department, increased by 11.2%.

• (1605)

Furthermore, there is a notion that first nations receive a disproportionate share of money, but according to this release, first nations individuals receive less than half the amount allocated to each Canadian. On average, Canadians receive \$15,400 in programs and services from their three levels of government, whereas first nations individuals receive \$7,200 in comparable programs and services from the federal government. Those are shocking figures. It does not stop with first nations.

I would like to talk about the Inuit. In the report "Housing in Nunavut: The Time for Action is Now" from 2003-04 and 2004-05, again there are more grim statistics. I will not go over the whole report, but it talks about the fact that 38.7% of Nunavut households are in core need, which means the housing is substandard, inadequate or unaffordable. Fifteen per cent of Nunavut's population is on a waiting list for public housing. This percentage does not include the number of people who have given up and removed their names from the list. The approximate length of the waiting list for public housing is three years. Three thousand units are needed immediately to relieve the current overcrowding rate and bring Nunavut on par with the rest of Canada. For the Inuit peoples in this country, there is a litany of problems, housing, education, access to water.

The Métis National Council Canada-Aboriginal Peoples Round-table sectoral sessions policy papers talk about housing, education and health care. I am going to briefly touch on housing once again because poverty and housing go hand in hand. If one is poor, one cannot afford adequate housing. In the Métis homeland, close to 60% or better of self-identifying Métis adults live on less than \$20,000 per annum before tax. We know in many parts of this country that on \$20,000 per year one could not possibly afford to rent or own adequate housing accommodation. These low income levels translate into higher incidents of affordability problems. This is compounded in many larger urban centres by the high cost of housing, both rental and home ownership, and by costs for shelter rising faster than income. All this dramatically affects the total

wellness of families as there is no money left for other necessities in life once they have paid for their housing.

One of the things often talked about is consultation. First nations, Métis and Inuit peoples would welcome meaningful consultation. They would welcome being at the table as the problems are identified. They would welcome being at the table as the solutions are discussed. They would welcome being at the table in a meaningful way when implementation plans are being drawn up. The reality is that consultation is often superficial, rushed and does not allow communities the broad spectrum.

One only has to look at the matrimonial real property consultation that is currently going on. The Native Women's Association of Canada has talked about how there were serious concerns from participants regarding the short timeframe for consultation and the turnaround time for the consultation process. They go on to talk about how in other consultation processes they were given at least a year. In this case they were given a mere three months.

We know how complex the issues are. When we talk about issues like poverty, housing, matrimonial real property and education, meaningful consultation means that first nations, Métis and Inuit peoples must help develop that consultation process. The courts have talked about that.

In conclusion, the Assembly of First Nations put together a report card on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. The Assembly of First Nations talked about the lack of progress on key socio-economic indicators. Based on our assessment, Canada has failed in terms of its action to date.

This is an equal opportunity failure. It is a failure on the part of the former Liberal government and it is a failure on the part of the current Conservative government. They have failed to put meaningful action in place in terms of housing, education, access to clean water, sewer infrastructure, et cetera.

International communities are now paying attention to what is going on here in Canada. Canada is one of the wealthiest countries in the world, yet first nations, Métis and Inuit peoples are living in third world conditions.

• (1610)

I would urge all members of the House to support the New Democratic Party motion and make a real difference in the lives of Canadians. Fairness and affordability should be our mantra.

• (1615)

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague made many statements and used a lot of facts and figures, but she knows me, she knows my riding, she knows that with all those figures and the value that they have, nothing compares to walking down the streets and visiting the homes. It is quite dramatic when we visit the people who live these lives and live in communities such as Pikangikum and North Spirit. Walking down the streets, one wonders how they can live in those homes and how they can survive some of our harsh climates.

Business of Supply

I believe that the member and I were elected on the same day. It is one thing to look back and blame people, but I want to look forward and see how we can do this.

I want to speak to my colleague about consultation. She mentioned that there was no consultation in the past, but I happen to know there was lots of consultation in the Kelowna accord. It was a process we started and regardless of whatever reasons she wants to give, it was not moved forward. It is about carrying on the talk. The Kelowna accord was the first step in answering that.

I would like her opinion on whether the Kelowna accord was a valuable step forward. Should we carry that forward?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, we know from communities like Pikangikum that the needs are desperate. I referred to a litany and again, there is a litany of communities across this country, Pikangikum, Kashechewan, Attawapiskat, and many more. The Kelowna accord was a good step toward closing the poverty gap in this country for first nations, Métis and Inuit people.

Recently the Auditor General in reviewing the B.C. treaty commission process, the B.C.T.C. process, talked in her report about the failure of governments to develop a meaningful consultation process. Although Kelowna was a good step, we know in many other circumstances that the consultation process has not been developed. When we are talking about land claims, comprehensive land claims, specific land claims, treaties, implementation of treaty agreements, the consultation process is flawed. In many cases, there is absolutely no dispute resolution process, for example.

I would agree it was a good first step, but I would suggest that there is much more work to be done.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, from listening to some of the conversation today I have some hope that we might get to an anti-poverty strategy that might deal with some of the very difficult circumstances that many of our first nations people live with.

I was in Thunder Bay a little over a week ago and there the face of poverty is obviously aboriginal. Poverty is horrendous and terrible and should not exist in this country.

The United Nations has called on us, because we signed on to covenants, agreements, to address the human rights of all of our people, particularly our aboriginal people. The UN has been particularly scathing in its criticism of us. Today's motion flows from some of that international concern and the leadership that has been shown.

I am really disappointed that the Bloc has indicated that it is not going to support this motion. When the Bloc members get a chance to speak, I would like to ask them why it is that they cannot see that we have been called upon by the international community to live up to some of the covenants on human rights that we have signed. The conditions our aboriginal brothers and sisters live in need to be addressed by the federal government. We need an anti-poverty strategy to, at the very least, deal with that.

How would the member square the circle of the Bloc not supporting this very important motion that has at its very heart the righting of our relationship as a country with our first nations?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, one of the things the member for Sault Ste. Marie talked about is fundamental to developing an anti-poverty strategy and that is the fact that the current government has failed to support the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. That would have been a strong signal to first nations, Métis and Inuit people and all Canadians that we take seriously indigenous rights in this country.

I would encourage all members, including our Bloc colleagues, to support this motion.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to take part in the debate on the NDP's motion today. I would also like to thank all of my colleagues who have talked about this motion today, especially the member for Sault Ste. Marie. For months now, even years, he has been travelling across Canada, visiting every region to learn more about poverty that has taken root over the years—poverty that is totally unacceptable.

The opposition motion was tabled by the NDP member for Sault Ste. Marie; hats off to him. The motion reads as follows:

That, in the opinion of the House, there is a growing prosperity gap in Canada that is making it harder for working and middle-class families to make ends meet and sees more and more Canadians, including women, children, seniors, aboriginal people and people with disabilities, slipping into poverty and therefore calls on the government, in cooperation with the provinces and territories, to implement a national anti-poverty strategy beginning with the reinstatement of the federal minimum wage to be initially set at \$10 per hour.

It says quite clearly, “in cooperation with the provinces”. I have trouble understanding the Bloc Québécois' argument that this falls under provincial jurisdiction. It says “in cooperation with the provinces”. Please. I do not see how the Bloc Québécois can go back to the workers of Quebec and explain that it voted against a motion because it claims a federal body cannot raise the minimum wage to \$10 an hour to try to help poor people in this country, our workers.

I will not waste all of my time on that issue. It will be up to Quebecers to judge the Bloc on its position when the Bloc votes against the NDP's motion this evening. This measure will not eliminate poverty, but it will help fight it.

Today, when men and women earning minimum wage cash their paycheques on Fridays, they have to go to food banks to get enough to make ends meet. This is happening in our country, which is supposedly one of the best countries in the world.

A while ago, the Liberal government, with the help of the Conservatives, made deep cuts to employment insurance. Now, 800,000 people do not qualify for employment insurance and 1.2 million children go hungry and live in poverty in our country. That is totally unacceptable.

Business of Supply

In Toronto, people are sleeping on cardboard boxes in front of city hall. This had never been seen in the past. Today, in big cities like East Vancouver or Montreal, people are having to beg in order to get food. In a country like ours, this is unacceptable.

The member for Nanaimo—Cowichan spoke about the aboriginal people, for example. Is poverty among the aboriginal people acceptable here, in Canada? Is this acceptable? I say it is not. It is shameful.

We see the Conservatives defending the corporations or companies that do not pay their employees. They do not talk about the company presidents, for example, who draw salaries worth tens of millions of dollars a year. As of January 15, they will have received more in salary than what the poor in Canada make in an entire year. No one talks about that.

I am proud of the NDP. During the reign of the former Liberal minority government, it secured \$1.6 billion for affordable housing, to give people a chance to have a roof over their heads. I was proud of that. In Bill C-48, \$1.5 billion was provided to give students a chance to survive. Poor people were trying to send their children to university and were not able to do it because it put them \$40,000 in debt. That is what it costs them. At the time, the Liberal government applied their bankruptcy over 10 years. They were treated like second-class citizens. And yet if a big corporation tells the government that it is going bankrupt overnight, there is no problem. It hides its money somewhere else, in other countries, some here, some there, and then it decides to declare bankruptcy. For those corporations, that is fine. But we, collectively, cannot help our families.

●(1625)

I know that welfare is a matter under provincial jurisdiction.

When the government cut employment insurance, it sent people directly onto welfare. The rate of people receiving welfare has risen everywhere in Canada. I think that as leaders and legislators we have a responsibility to provide the tools so that people can get out of poverty. For a country like ours, as rich as ours, not to be able to feed its schoolchildren is shameful.

Take employment insurance as an example. The government has passed laws that create poverty rather than stemming it. That is what the government has done.

When we proposed measures in the House to change the Employment Insurance Act so that workers who lose their jobs could receive employment insurance, the Liberals and Conservatives were against those changes. That is what has led to poverty.

People in my riding call me and say, “Mr. Godin, I do not even have money to pay for the oil to put in my furnace,” or “Sir, I do not even have money to pay for wood to heat with. My children and I have to live in a house where it is cold and we are freezing”. This is shameful.

I am proud of the NDP motion. This evening, I would like to see who will vote against this motion. I am anxious to see who will vote against the idea of being able to help a worker to earn \$10 an hour in our country.

The government boasts that the unemployment rate has declined and that there are more people working. In fact, there may be more people working but some of them are forced to hold three jobs in order to make ends meet.

Some people are forced to work in a restaurant during the day, to work in a second restaurant at night and to work in a third restaurant on the weekend in order to get by. Often, it is women who are the poorest. They are frequently single mothers. Look at the percentages and look at the studies that have been done in Canada. We are not helping the people who live on social welfare.

There should be transfers to the provinces, especially when we see that the government has billions and billions of surplus dollars in its coffers. I repeat, there are billions and billions of dollars.

The transfer of funds to the provinces would enable poor people to get off the street, to find affordable housing. What kind of society do we have? On the one hand, each week the government sends its ministers travelling to other countries of the world to tell everybody what a great country we have in Canada. On the other hand, we are not even able to look after our aboriginal people, nor are we able to take care of the poor people who live on the street. We are not able to look after the children who go to school on an empty stomach because they did not have even a glass of milk for breakfast. It is shameful. This evening, I defy anyone in this House to vote against a motion that seeks to prevent poverty in our country.

In the period when Ed Broadbent was a member of Parliament, in 1989, Parliament was unanimous in its desire to eliminate poverty within 10 years. However, instead of being eliminated, poverty has doubled.

Instead of helping to eliminate poverty, they have created it by making cuts to employment insurance. Then, they tried to make us believe that people were lazy slackers who did not want to work. That is not the case. It is because their jobs have been eliminated. Workers have lost their jobs in textiles and the fishery. Paper mills have closed their doors. Sawmills have shut down. That is what is happening in our country. That is how we have created poverty.

To be eligible for employment insurance, a worker must have accumulated 910 hours. Many women work 20 hours per week. In spite of that, they are not eligible for employment insurance. In addition, processing employment insurance applications takes 45 days. During that time, how do you think those people are supposed to live?

In conclusion, I ask this House of Commons and all political parties to vote in favour of this motion, for all Canadians and also for Quebeckers. The Bloc Québécois is ready to vote against this motion. I ask the Bloc to vote with us in solidarity with all workers.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order, please. It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Yukon, National Defence; the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre, Manitoba; the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, Shipbuilding.

Business of Supply

•(1630)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for his tenacity on the EI file. He is very good at his work.

He would be interested to know that in 1989, Ed Broadbent, on what we thought would be his last day as a parliamentarian, brought forward a private member's motion to seek to achieve the elimination of poverty by the year 2000. It was a Friday afternoon. I believe there were only 11 people in the chamber when the question was put.

Ms. Dawn Black: That's not true. I was there.

Mr. Paul Szabo: The papers reported just a handful of people in the House. When they called the question, somebody said, yea, and nobody else said anything. It carried and disappeared.

The papers did not even report the story, which was interesting. However, the speeches were good because they emulated many of the arguments that the member opposite made about the basic necessities of people, and he gave examples of that.

My question for the member has to do with a federal minimum wage, starting at \$10. It appears that it is just a way of indicating to the provinces that they should also reassess their own minimum wage levels. Is this something that the member would recommend to all provinces, to emulate the \$10 minimum wage?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the members that at the time Doug Young was a Liberal, although I know he signed a card with the Reform Party after. On July 31, 1989, he wrote an article in the paper stating that it would be devastating if the Conservative government cut the employment insurance, that it would cause poverty for all people.

On that Friday, if there was nobody in the House of Commons, I do not know where they were. They were being paid to be in the House. The NDP was in the House doing its job. Maybe the Liberals were at home.

When we look at the \$10 minimum wage, we want all provinces to follow. If we want it to work, it is in cooperation with all provinces to ensure it is done across the country. They have to work together to bring their minimum wages up.

When I speak to business people, they tell me if everybody raises their minimum wages, they will be okay with it. If people get paid more, it means that they can buy more. Right now they are at the point where they are starving. They are not buying. If only one province brings its minimum wage up to \$10 an hour and another stays at \$6.50 or \$7.00, then competition happens. They will agree with it if we do it across the board and help all people raise their standard of living. Nobody can live on \$6 and \$8 an hour. It is impossible. Go and ask them, and that is what they will say.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague's presentation was excellent. He has such passion the people in Canada who live in dire circumstances and in poverty. He is a great advocate for working people in the country.

One of the things he mentioned was the issue of women working 20 hours a week and not being eligible for child care. It reminded me of something Rosalie Abella, a Supreme Court Justice, said. She said

that child care would be the ramp that would drive single parents out of poverty.

Would my colleague speak to the commitments made in 1993 by the Liberals on a national child care program and again in 1997 and in 2000? They never acted on this. Could my colleague tell us about his experiences with women who are looking for child care in his community?

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was invited to a meeting in Moncton. Women were talking about child care. They sincerely did not believe the \$100 being given by the Conservatives to parents with children would help those parents who had to work.

The reason for child care is because parents have to go to work. It is not for the ones who stay home because their husbands make maybe \$80,000 a year. The ones who are forced to go to work need child care. They need workers to be well paid. They need good programs and decent child care. The Conservatives have been negligent on that. It took it away from them. Shame on them and shame on the Liberals, too.

•(1635)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Joliette.

I am happy this afternoon to rise and speak to this motion denouncing the impoverishment of the middle class and proposing a national anti-poverty strategy. Although the middle class has obviously been slipping into poverty, the Bloc Québécois has problems with a national anti-poverty strategy.

Whether Liberal or Conservative, the federal government has obviously failed in its duty to the most vulnerable people in society. The gap between rich and poor has been constantly widening.

All the while, the Bloc Québécois has been resolutely defending the interests of the unemployed. I myself brought forward a bill to improve the employment insurance system. Other colleagues in the Bloc have introduced a number of bills on employment insurance and an independent employment insurance fund. The Bloc has always tried, therefore, to defend the interests of the unemployed and will continue to do so.

We tried to defend the interests of older workers through programs on mass lay-offs and the interests of older people through the guaranteed income supplement. We defended women, minority groups, and all the Quebecers whom the government abandoned when it eliminated or cut back the programs to help people on low incomes.

The Bloc Québécois agrees that it is important to have a national anti-poverty strategy, but it is the strategy of the nation of Quebec that it supports. The federal government's responsibility is to provide adequate support, through financial transfers, to the provinces and Quebec to help them combat poverty.

Business of Supply

The Bloc Québécois feels that a Canada-wide strategy adopted by the federal government, as proposed in this motion, would not solve anything and would just duplicate what is already done in Quebec and some provinces.

Quebec already has \$7 daycare, benefits for families living on modest incomes, and low tuition costs, and the results have been very good.

For example, our numerous programs to support families resulted in the birthrate actually increasing in 2006. That has not happened for 20 years. When there is proper support for families that want to have children and programs to provide them with a reasonable standard of living, then we see an increase in the birthrate.

The key for us is obviously always respect for particular jurisdictions. We urge the federal government to do a few things that for far too long it has refused to do, in particular, improve the employment insurance system, establish a work program for older workers, use the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation surpluses to build social housing, and implement some of the other programs we have suggested over the years.

In regard to the proposal in this motion for a minimum federal wage, it is important to know that the minimum wage varies now from one place to another. In Quebec, for example, where the government is already very aware of this issue, we have had legislation to fight poverty and social exclusion since December 2002, in addition to the social programs addressing poverty. The minimum wage in Quebec is among the highest in Canada.

If we could get transfer payments that would enable us, among other things, to resolve the fiscal imbalance, we could obviously increase what we give to the most disadvantaged people in our society. Among the most vulnerable people that the federal government has abandoned are thousands of Quebeckers.

There is no doubt that we will remember September 25, 2006 as a dark day, as a result of those cuts. It was the same day on which the government declared an annual surplus of \$13 billion. I would remind the House that the Conservatives announced \$1 billion in cuts over two years. How were these drastic cuts to be made? They were to be made based on Conservative ideology. The cuts affected education and literacy programs, a number of programs targeted at those most in need, and social housing. For us, this was a dark day, one that we deplore. The anti-poverty strategy will have to be rebuilt from scratch. Certainly, we must compensate all those people who have been left needy and destitute.

• (1640)

I would like to touch on child care services. In our view, as soon as it came into power, the Conservative government reneged on the agreement Quebec had with the previous government, which recognized its competence, after Quebec fought hard for years and years to have it recognized. Since then, the government has created a shortfall of \$807 million. It has done the same thing with the agreements it had with the other provinces.

Furthermore, the Conservative government went ahead with a taxable allowance of \$1,200 paid to the lower-income person in each couple, not based on household income. In our view, the direct payment to parents constitutes a federal social program, that is, an

element of federal policy. This is clearly interference in our jurisdictions, which means another broken promise made by the Prime Minister, who said he would respect Quebec's jurisdictions.

We all know that the need is in Quebec but the money is in Ottawa. We have said so on many occasions. Furthermore, the Conservative government is attempting to meddle in Quebec's jurisdiction by establishing what it calls a pan-Canadian child care system—although no spaces have yet been created—that meets pan-Canadian standards, with conditions that it wants to impose for quality of service, universality, accessibility and child development. We will obviously say no to that.

The Bloc Québécois has reminded the government more than 50 times—that is right, more than 50 times—that it was encroaching on our jurisdiction and we asked it to back down and provide full financial compensation.

This federation already does not work very well. If we have to keep telling the government that it is encroaching on our jurisdiction, we will never get anything done and we will spend our days just defending ourselves and trying to keep what is ours.

With regard to child care, it is important that we recover what belongs to us in order to continue investing in our day care system. It is important to speak of the thorny aspects of federal taxation. Child care expenses are a federal deduction. However, since the child care expense for 200,000 Quebec children is \$7 per day, the parents can only deduct the amount they pay. Consequently the federal government has appropriated almost \$1.5 billion from parents since 1998. Quebec pays for day care services for these children and Ottawa pockets the money. Year after year, the government appropriates \$250 million from Quebec parents, or an average of \$1,316 per child, which is much more than the taxable \$1,200 allowed by the federal government.

I will stop there, but I will be pleased to answer questions.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank our colleague from the Bloc for her presentation. My question will be simple. This is an issue of federal minimum wage. In 1996, the Liberal government transferred this file to the provinces, which created a difference between the provinces, such as Quebec and New Brunswick. This seems different, but it is a federal jurisdiction. It is a matter of federal employment, federal jobs.

My colleague is saying to all Quebeckers that because of the provincial jurisdictions that the federal government granted us in 1996, the Bloc does not agree that the minimum wage for workers in Quebec should be increased to \$10. For that reason, they will prevent this House from passing this motion, or at least they will vote against it.

It is true that Quebec has good child care and many good things. We would like to have as many across the country. The rest of the country says it would like to have the same thing as Quebec. The same is true when it comes to pesticides. Quebec has good legislation against pesticides, preventing people from using pesticides on their flower beds. When the NDP tabled a motion to ensure that everyone across the country got the same treatment as Quebec, the Bloc voted against it.

Business of Supply

Since this seems to be a provincial jurisdiction, they would rather focus on that than combat poverty. They prefer to focus on provincial jurisdiction instead of the poverty and hunger of women and children. Is that what they are saying here this evening?

• (1645)

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his question. He obviously completely misunderstands.

When this motion speaks about a national anti-poverty strategy, it means a strategy applying all over Canada. We always say that it is better to transfer the money to the provinces. The provinces are closest to the needs of the people and are best positioned to determine what those needs are and provide the necessary assistance.

This can easily be seen in aboriginal affairs. Under the Indian Act, the federal government is responsible for aboriginal peoples and we can see what a bad job it does.

It seems to me, therefore, that it should leave the management of these anti-poverty strategies to the governments in whose jurisdiction they lie. We know where the money is best invested. Give it to us and we will solve our problems.

[*English*]

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member from Quebec mentioned child care in Quebec. In fact, when we are elected as members of Parliament, we are here to represent our own ridings as well as the rest of Canada. We are talking about a child care strategy. The previous government signed landmark agreements with each province. I wonder if the hon. member was in favour of those particular agreements rather than the \$100 taxed benefit.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question. To begin with, I obviously represent the people of Trois-Rivières and I represent Quebeckers.

I already stated our position in my address. Insofar as the child care agreement is concerned, we finally obtained this after a hard fight and we fully agreed with it because it complied with the areas of jurisdiction. There was an agreement for \$870 million to be paid to Quebec over five years and for it to manage its child care system. That was fine because we already had a system that worked well. We have our own ways of doing things. Our system is also perfectly integrated with our educational system and schools. This approach suited us very well, therefore.

The drastic cuts that we are seeing now pose a threat to our daycare system, which we want to expand. That is why we will continue to oppose them.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the motion, particularly after the member for Trois-Rivières, who has given a masterful explanation of why the Bloc Québécois opposes the NDP motion.

I listened to my NDP colleague earlier talking about federal jurisdiction in relation to the Canada Labour Code. However, people are not living in poverty based on some jurisdictional division, they are poor in the context of a society, as part of a group that we call a nation, with a state. In the case of Quebec, it is the Quebec state that

has this responsibility. In fact it is a constitutional responsibility, in the Canadian context, to ensure that people are able to live their lives without being affected by poverty, with an adequate standard of living.

We cannot compartmentalize things the way the NDP wants to do. In fact, that is not what the NDP wants to do. It would like it to be the federal government that has responsibility for all of Canada, for the fight against poverty. But to the Bloc Québécois this is doubly clear. We think that this fight against poverty must be a function of the Quebec state and of the collective spirit of the Quebec nation. It is therefore clear that the sole purpose of the NDP motion is to give the federal government powers to harmonize, centralize, coordinate. Those are words that we hear from the Conservatives and the Liberals as well as the NDP. On this, they all sound exactly alike.

So it is not a question of the minimum wage or the fight against poverty, it is the fact that behind those good intentions we know very well that there are centralizing aims.

When we talk about childcare, it is the same thing. They say, "Oh, the Quebec child care system, what a great model".

It is no longer the case now, but the Liberals wanted to implement a Canada-wide child care system. They wanted to compel Quebec to spend all the money sent by the federal government for the Canada-wide child care system on the child care system. But we already spend a lot on this, while there are other social needs to be met, precisely so that we are able to have this national Quebec strategy to combat poverty. In particular, there is social assistance, which has been particularly ignored in the political arena in recent years, which is too bad.

The same is true for the minimum wage. I agree that the minimum wage has to be raised, but the battle will be waged in Quebec, with the unionized and non-unionized workers and the labour federations. That is true for Quebec, with the Confédération des syndicats nationaux, the Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec, the CSD, the CSQ. They have a very important responsibility for waging this battle to have the minimum wage raised in Quebec. The same is true for the provincial federations in the rest of Canada. If the CLC wants to coordinate the battle, let it do so. In Quebec, however, just on this point, more than half of unionized workers are not affiliated with the Canadian Labour Congress. The responsibility of the labour movement in Quebec is therefore to wage a battle that must be fought on the Quebec battleground, not the Canada-wide battleground.

I might also point out that employment insurance was once under provincial jurisdiction. It was transferred to the federal government in the early 1940s. I always say that Adélard Godbout must be turning over in his grave if he sees how the federal government has used employment insurance as a cash cow, for all sorts of purposes other than the ones it was meant for. Poor Adélard Godbout must be turning over in his grave for agreeing to let the federal government do this.

Business of Supply

It was probably done with very good intentions. I can imagine the debate that took place. “What? Quebec nationalists want to prevent the federal government from setting up a fine unemployment insurance program”—in those days they called a spade a spade—from sea to sea, an cross-Canada program that we will coordinate. It will be wonderful”.

What happened? The workers in Quebec, despite their extraordinary efforts at the time of Mr. Axworthy's so-called reform, were not able to succeed because there was no mobilization in the rest of Canada, except in New Brunswick, I must admit.

We were the only ones willing to fight. Now, all across Canada, people recognize that the system has been completely destroyed by the federal government. There is a lot of work to be done there.

I hope that the solidarity of workers in Quebec and the rest of Canada will mean that, with the Bloc Québécois, the NDP and the Liberals, I hope—the fact of being in opposition will perhaps open their eyes to some of the gaps—we will be able to reverse the trend and produce a system that will contribute in each of the provinces and in Quebec to supporting the anti-poverty strategy.

• (1650)

The motion starts from good intentions, but it hides a basic problem in its conception of the fight against poverty. That is what we are rejecting in voting against the NDP motion. Let us recall the old saying that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. The motion before us is a good example.

In addition, they want to maintain this system that is really a concession. I have a great deal of trouble understanding that there should be a Canada Labour Code. In my view, it would be much more normal for workers who reside in Quebec to be covered by the Quebec Labour Code. Among other benefits, that would entitle workers who are pregnant to preventive withdrawal from of work, which is not the case with the Canada Labour Code. Let us remember that less than 8% of all workers are covered by the Canada Labour Code.

There is a second factor. The motion looks very good but it does very little. They tell us that we need an anti-poverty strategy—a national strategy. However, that does not respect the motion adopted by this House, which recognized that the Québécois form a nation. They should have said, at least, a bi-national strategy. In my opinion, Acadians also form a nation and the first nations are also nations. They should have proposed to implement a multinational, pan-Canadian strategy within a united Canada.

However, in my view this is an aberration. All workers in Quebec should be covered by the Quebec Labour Code. So, I will not support a motion that wants to institutionalize a situation that we virtually corrected by saying that workers who are subject to the Canada Labour Code, in Quebec or in any province, will be subject to the same minimum wage as other workers.

We must work to increase the minimum wage, but it must be done on the basis of the Quebec and Canadian labour movement. When I speak of the labour movement, I am talking about people earning the minimum wage and who are not organized. That is where responsibility, of the unions in particular, is important. Otherwise, we fall into the corporate approach.

When I said that this motion looks good but does little, I was referring to the fact that only 1% of the workers subject to the Canada Labour Code earn the minimum wage. The motion implies that it is a key part of a multinational anti-poverty strategy in a united Canada. That is wrong. Only 2% or 18, 000 working people would be affected by this NDP motion.

I think they should have ended this motion by saying that the House of Commons requests the government to reinstitute a proper employment insurance system. That would affect hundreds or even millions of working people all over Quebec and Canada and would be in an area of federal jurisdiction. That would have been much clearer.

It is the same for older workers. Why did they not say that a program to help older workers is a priority or a key part of a multinational anti-poverty strategy in a united Canada? Why not mention the guaranteed income supplement?

Quebeckers have decided, at the present time, to have a child care system that is not public. I remind the House that these are non-profit organizations where users pay \$7. Let us hope that, after the election campaign, it will still be \$7. If Mr. Charest manages to fool people and get re-elected, I would be very worried. But I do not think so. I have confidence in the intelligence of Quebeckers. It should be said, though, that the government provides a lot of support. As a result, the federal government does not have to provide \$1.5 billion in tax credits—as my hon. colleague mentioned earlier—of which Quebec parents are therefore deprived.

If there had not been a centralizing desire behind this motion, the Bloc Québécois would have agreed with a Canada-wide strategy to fight poverty in the federal government's own jurisdictions and not in ways, as proposed here, that are aimed simply at further centralizing a country that is already too centralized.

• (1655)

[English]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, like my colleague from Joliette, I too came from the labour movement. I used to represent members of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, a fine union that is active in Quebec as well, but I disagree with the member profoundly on his reasoning for not being able to support this particular resolution.

I am sure he knows that there was a labour compact. There was a solidarity among working people that manifested itself in the post-war era, a labour accord, so to speak. If productivity is up and profits are up, workers' wages are supposed to go up correspondingly. That was the deal.

Business of Supply

That was the post-war accord, the labour contract we made with industry so that there would be relative labour peace and we would not have to wildcat or resort to violence in the streets to get our fair share of this great nation's prosperity. But that accord was broken. It was violated. It has been torn up. The compact has been destroyed. Therefore, this is now up to leadership in labour movements, to activist parties like the New Democratic Party and to members of the Bloc, who I assume share this objective of sharing the redistribution of wealth in a more equitable fashion, which is the job that labour unions have always had the responsibility for.

I do not understand my colleague's reasoning in that he can find an excuse to not support something that I know he personally is committed to and to let some other reason get in the way of the primary objective, which is to elevate the standards of wages and working conditions of the people we represent. When I say "we", I mean them and us.

I do not accept his arguments. I disagree with his arguments profoundly.

Let me simply say that we live in the richest and most powerful civilization in the history of the world. I do not accept that we cannot afford to provide the basic needs of a family for it to survive. I reject that out of hand.

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I will take another example. I completely understand the NDP members' position. To them, the government of the Canadian nation is the federal government. Unlike us, they would probably prefer that the federal government have far more responsibility.

For example, when the Standing Committee on Finance travelled across Canada, I saw that many people were toying with the idea of a federal education department. If the federal government were to announce that it was creating a federal education department and that it wanted to invest \$5 billion in post-secondary education, and if in future the provinces had to meet standards imposed by the federal education department, we would be opposed to that. What would our NDP friends—and I stress the word "friends"—have to say? My NDP friends would say that, for the good of the students, we have to vote for this plan. We cannot accept that, because education is one of Quebec's constitutional responsibilities and because education and post-secondary education are extremely important aspects of Quebec's identity. Such considerations are not important to the New Democrats, but they are important to us.

This measure affects barely 18,000 people who do deserve better working conditions and a much higher wage than they are currently earning. But this strategy is ill considered. We would have preferred that the motion pertain to some of the federal government's key areas of jurisdiction: employment insurance, old age security and other areas that are the federal government's constitutional responsibility.

[*English*]

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to say how disappointed I am. The road to hell is paved with good intentions: what kind of a statement is that? I came here full of hope. I came to the House in 2004 full of optimism that I could work with

people of kindred spirit to change the circumstances for many of the people I served as a soup kitchen coordinator before I came here, so that we would make life better.

I have worked with a number of Bloc members on committee and have found them to be people of kindred spirit. I thought we could do something and make things better. Obviously this is a most important moment for me, in bringing forward a motion that would commit the federal government to an anti-poverty strategy, and now he says no. I do not—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Joliette should know that the time has expired, but I will give him a few moments to answer.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I will be very brief. If something other than this wording had been chosen, we would probably have been able to agree. We are not opposed to the good intention, we are opposed to the way it is worded and to the plan that is hidden behind this motion.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to respond to the motion presented by the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie, that a national anti-poverty strategy be implemented.

I can assure each of the members of this House that the welfare of all Canadians is a fundamental concern of Canada's new government. We are taking measures on numerous fronts to make real improvements in the lives of our most vulnerable citizens.

It is an honour for me to mention a few of the programs and a few of the measures that we have recently implemented to help the entire population of Canada to participate fully in our economy and our society. It is through these programs that Canada's new government extends a hand to the most vulnerable Canadians, to enable them to achieve their objectives of economic security, health, self-respect and autonomy.

On February 16, for example, the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, together with Claude Richmond, the British Columbia minister, announced a \$223 million investment to help Canadians with disabilities acquire skills that will enable them to find meaningful, long-term employment.

These investments extend the labour market agreements for persons with disabilities in the provinces until March 31, 2008. The Government of Canada is working with the provinces, through these agreements, to help people with disabilities overcome barriers and become active participants in the labour market and to provide them with the recognition they deserve.

Business of Supply

I would also like to mention another project, funded under the new adult learning, literacy and essential skills program of Human Resources and Social Development Canada, which is designed specifically to help people with visual disabilities to improve their reading ability. Under this project, our government is paying about \$192,000 to improve the development of literacy programs and access to literacy programs for people who use Braille, by providing for the smooth transition from current Braille codes to the new codes. This project will contribute to reducing the barriers faced by people in our society who are blind or visually impaired.

Canada's new government is determined to improve literacy levels and ensure that federal funds are used to support projects and activities that offer concrete assistance for people who want to improve their ability to read and write. Provinces, territories, municipalities, employers, non-governmental organizations and families all have important roles to play in supporting literacy efforts.

With a budget of \$81 million over two years—2006-2007 and 2007-2008—HRSDC's adult learning, literacy and essential skills program will support adult learning and literacy activities that will have a tangible and lasting impact on learners.

We are inviting literacy groups and community organizations to submit proposals for innovative, results-based strategies that can make a difference in people's lives.

Together, we can achieve great things and lay the groundwork for future partnerships and investments that will enable us to meet the challenges we face in our communities in relation to literacy.

As the House knows, some of the most vulnerable Canadians are aboriginal people. Our government has recently invested nearly \$8 million in the James Bay employment and training program, part of the aboriginal skills and employment partnership program, to help aboriginal people acquire the skills they need to work in the mining industry. We have also invested more than \$4.5 million to help to raise the number of aboriginal Canadians in the trades in Alberta so that they can secure long-term employment.

Our government also recently launched an important new strategy to address homelessness. The new homelessness partnering strategy, in which we will invest \$270 million over two years, aims to develop strong partnerships with the provinces and territories, all departments and federal organizations that play a role in addressing homelessness, as well as with municipalities and community groups.

• (1705)

These partnerships will allow us to really help vulnerable Canadians get off the street and find housing.

The second part of our new strategy with respect to housing involves a \$256 million investment for a two year extension of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's renovation programs for low income households.

I would also like to remind the House that the 2006 budget included a \$1.4 billion investment to help citizens find safe, adequate and affordable housing through the creation of trust funds for the provinces and territories.

Furthermore, thanks to this affordable housing initiative, we are creating affordable housing in cooperation with our provincial and territorial partners.

As a final point, I would like to highlight some of the ways in which our government is helping the most vulnerable of our youth and seniors.

All families, including low-income families, receive \$100 a month, totalling \$1,200 a year, for every child under six thanks to the universal child care benefit program. In total, we are paying Canadian families \$2.5 billion annually through this new program.

Furthermore, through the Canada child tax benefit, which includes the national child benefit supplement, we contribute \$9.2 billion in additional funds to low- and middle-income families with children every year. For example, a low-income family with two children can receive up to \$6,175 per year to help raise those children.

I would add that Canada's new government has proposed creating a working income tax benefit, which will fulfill its commitment to work with the provinces and territories to tear down the welfare wall and make working attractive to low- and middle-income Canadians.

Thanks to the Canada pension plan, old age security and the guaranteed income supplement, the poverty rate among older people has plummeted from 21% in 1980 to less than 6% in 2004, the lowest rate ever recorded.

We reached out to older people by creating the new secretary of state for seniors. We are also working on setting up a national seniors council to study the challenges and opportunities presented by Canada's aging population.

Clearly, our government is working for vulnerable segments of the Canadian population. We are working to ensure their economic security and their well-being, and to enable them to reach their personal goals as full participants in our economy and society. This commitment is an integral part of our ongoing work to build a strong, humane country.

This is why our government will not support the motion introduced by the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie.

• (1710)

[English]

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments and her participation in the debate today, and listening to all the good things the Conservatives have done since they came to power.

However, they are just not showing up on the street. I am out talking to people across the country and they are not telling me that life is any better. As a matter of fact, through information from an international study that was done on Canada, Armine Yalnizyan wrote an article recently indicating that poverty was rising among children and new immigrants; that the middle-class was finding it increasingly difficult to afford education and housing; and that 250,000 Canadians were living on the streets. Four hundred non-government organizations from 50 countries said this about our country. This is not a very good message to be sending, never mind the reality that exists on the streets.

How does the hon. member square that? How does she square the litany of accomplishments and achievements with what people are saying, as I travel the country, about the conditions in which they must live and the poverty that exists?

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1750)

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

(*Division No. 114*)

YEAS

Members

Alghabra	Angus
Bagnell	Bains
Barnes	Beaumier
Bélanger	Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bevilacqua	Bevington
Black	Blaikie
Bonin	Boshcoff
Brown (Oakville)	Cannis
Chamberlain	Chan
Charlton	Chow
Christopherson	Coderre
Comartin	Cotler
Crowder	Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Cuzner	D'Amours
Dewar	Dhaliwal
Dhalla	Dion
Dryden	Easter

Eyking
 Fry
 Godin
 Graham
 Ignatieff
 Julian
 Karetak-Lindell
 Keeper
 LeBlanc
 MacAulay
 Maloney
 Marston
 Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
 Masse
 McCallum
 McGuinty
 McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
 Merasty
 Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
 Nash
 Owen
 Patry
 Peterson
 Proulx
 Redman
 Robillard
 Rota
 Savage
 Scarpaleggia
 Sgro
 Silva
 Simms
 St. Denis
 Stoffer
 Telegdi
 Thibault (West Nova)
 Turner
 Volpe
 Wilfert
 Wrzesnewskyj

Business of Supply

Folco
 Godfrey
 Goodale
 Holland
 Jennings
 Kadis
 Karygiannis
 Layton
 Lee
 Malhi
 Marleau
 Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
 Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
 Mathysen
 McDonough
 McGuire
 McTeague
 Minna
 Murphy (Charlottetown)
 Neville
 Pacetti
 Pearson
 Priddy
 Ratansi
 Regan
 Rodriguez
 Russell
 Savoie
 Scott
 Siksay
 Simard
 St. Amand
 Steckle
 Szabo
 Temelkovski
 Tonks
 Valley
 Wasylcia-Leis
 Wilson
 Zed— 114

NAYS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
André	Arthur
Baird	Barbot
Batters	Bellavance
Bernier	Bezan
Bigras	Blackburn
Blais	Blaney
Bonsant	Bouchard
Boucher	Bourgeois
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Brunelle	Calkins
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie	Carrier
Casey	Casson
Chong	Crête
Cummins	Davidson
Day	Del Mastro
Demers	Deschamps
Devolin	Doyle
Duceppe	Dykstra
Emerson	Epp
Faille	Fast
Finley	Fitzpatrick
Flaherty	Fletcher
Freeman	Gagnon
Galipeau	Gallant
Gauthier	Goldring
Goodyear	Gourde
Gravel	Grewal
Guay	Guergis
Guimond	Hanger
Harper	Harris
Harvey	Hawn
Hearn	Hiebert
Hill	Hinton

Business of Supply

Jaffer	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Khan
Komarnicki	Kotto
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Laforest
Laframboise	Lake
Lauzon	Lavallée
Lemay	Lemieux
Lessard	Lévesque
Lukiwski	Lunn
Lunney	Lussier
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Manning	Mayes
Ménard (Hochelaga)	Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Mills
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Nadeau	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
Obhrai	Oda
Ouellet	Pallister
Paquette	Paradis
Perron	Petit
Picard	Plamondon
Poillievre	Prentice
Preston	Rajotte
Reid	Richardson
Ritz	Schellenberger
Shipley	Skelton
Smith	Solberg
Sorenson	St-Cyr
St-Hilaire	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Basques)	
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	Thompson (Wild Rose)
Toews	Trost
Tweed	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Verner	Vincent
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Williams	Yelich— 162

PAIRED

Members

Asselin	Bachand
Benoit	Lalonde
Malo	Mark
Scheer	Tilson— 8

The Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

[*English*]

OPPOSITION MOTION—GOVERNMENT POLICIES

The Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Thursday, February 15, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion of the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore relating to the business of supply.

• (1800)

[*Translation*]

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

*(Division No. 115)***YEAS**

Members

Alghabra	André
Angus	Bagnell
Bains	Barbot

Barnes
Béanger
Bellavance
Bevington
Black
Blais
Bonsant
Bouchard
Brown (Oakville)
Cannis
Chamberlain
Charlton
Christopherson
Comartin
Crête
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
D'Amours
Deschamps
Dhaliwal
Dion
Duceppe
Eyking
Folco
Fry
Gauthier
Godin
Graham
Guay
Holland
Jennings
Kadis
Karygiannis
Kotto
Laframboise
Layton
Lee
Lessard
Lussier
Malhi
Marleau
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mathysen
McDonough
McGuire
McTeague
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Minna
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Nash
Ouellet
Pacetti
Patry
Perron
Picard
Priddy
Ratansi
Regan
Rodriguez
Russell
Savoie
Scott
Siksay
Simard
St-Cyr
St. Amand
Steckle
Szabo
Temelkovski
Basques)
Thibault (West Nova)
Turner
Vincent
Wasylycia-Leis
Wilson
Zed— 155

Beaumier
Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bevilacqua
Bigras
Blaikie
Bonin
Boshcoff
Bourgeois
Brunelle
Carrier
Chan
Chow
Coderre
Cotler
Crowder
Cuzner
Demers
Dewar
Dhalla
Dryden
Easter
Faille
Freeman
Gagnon
Godfrey
Goodale
Gravel
Guimond
Ignatieff
Julian
Karetak-Lindell
Keeper
Laforest
Lavallée
LeBlanc
Lemay
Lévesque
MacAulay
Maloney
Marston
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Masse
McCallum
McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Merasty
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Nadeau
Neville
Owen
Paquette
Pearson
Peterson
Plamondon
Proulx
Redman
Robillard
Rota
Savage
Scarpaleggia
Sgro
Silva
Simms
St-Hilaire
St. Denis
Stoffer
Telegdi
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Tonks
Valley
Volpe
Wilfert
Wrzesnewskyj

NAYS

Members

Abлонczy
Allen
Ambrose

Business of Supply

Anders
Arthur
Batters
Bezan
Blaney
Breitkreuz
Brown (Barrie)
Calkins
Cannon (Pontiac)
Casey
Chong
Davidson
Del Mastro
Doyle
Emerson
Fast
Fitzpatrick
Fletcher
Gallant
Goodyear
Grewal
Hanger
Harris
Hawn
Hiebert
Hinton
Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Khan
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauzon
Lukiwski
Lunney
MacKenzie
Mayes
Merrifield
Mills
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Norlock
Obhrai
Pallister
Petit
Prentice
Rajotte
Richardson
Schellenberger
Skelton
Solberg
Stanton
Strahl
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Toews
Tweed
Van Loan
Verner
Warawa
Watson
Yelich — 121

Anderson
Baird
Bernier
Blackburn
Boucher
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Bruinooge
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Carrie
Casson
Cummins
Day
Devolin
Dykstra
Epp
Finley
Flaherty
Galipeau
Goldring
Gourde
Guergis
Harper
Harvey
Hearn
Hill
Jaffer
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki
Lake
Lemieux
Lunn
MacKay (Central Nova)
Manning
Menzies
Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Nicholson
O'Connor
Oda
Paradis
Poilievre
Preston
Reid
Ritz
Shipley
Smith
Sorenson
Storseth
Sweet
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Trost
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Wallace
Warkentin
Williams

PAIRED

Members

Asselin
Benoit
Malo
Scheer

Bachand
Lalonde
Mark
Tilson— 8

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

[English]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

The House resumed from February 16 consideration of the motion that Bill C-31, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Public Service Employment Act, be read the third time and passed, and of the motion that this question be now put.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred division on the previous question at the third reading stage of Bill C-31.

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, should you seek it you would find unanimous consent to apply the results of the vote just taken to the motion currently before the House with Conservative members present this evening voting yes.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, Liberals will be voting yes on this bill.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois is in favour of this motion.

Mr. Yvon Godin: The NDP is voting against this motion.

Mr. André Arthur: Mr. Speaker, I am voting in favour of this motion.

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

(Division No. 116)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
Albrecht
Allen
Ambrose
Anderson
Arthur
Bains
Barbot
Batters
Bélanger
Bernier
Bezan
Blackburn
Blaney
Bonsant
Bouchard
Bourgeois
Brown (Oakville)
Brown (Barrie)
Brunelle
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrier
Casson
Chan
Coderre
Crête
Cuzner
Davidson
Del Mastro
Deschamps
Dhaliwal
Dion
Dryden
Dykstra
Emerson
Eyking
Fast
Fitzpatrick
Fletcher
Freeman
Gagnon
Gallant
Godfrey

Ablonczy
Alghabra
Allison
Anders
André
Bagnell
Baird
Barnes
Beaumier
Bellavance
Bevilacqua
Bjgras
Blais
Bonin
Boshcoff
Boucher
Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Bruinooge
Calkins
Cannin
Carrie
Casey
Chamberlain
Chong
Cotler
Cummins
D'Amours
Day
Demers
Devolin
Dhalla
Doyle
Duceppe
Easter
Epp
Faille
Finley
Flaherty
Folco
Fry
Galipeau
Gauthier
Goldring

Business of Supply

Goodale
Gourde
Gravel
Guay
Guimond
Harper
Harvey
Hearn
Hill
Holland
Jaffer
Jennings
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Karygiannis
Keeper
Khan
Kotto
Laforest
Lake
Lavallée
Lee
Lemieux
Lévesque
Lunn
Lussier
MacKay (Central Nova)
Malhi
Manning
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
McCallum
McGuire
McTeague
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Merasty
Miller
Minna
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Neville
Norlock
Obhrai
Ouellet
Pacetti
Paquette
Patry
Perron
Petit
Plamondon
Prentice
Proulx
Ratansi
Regan
Richardson
Robillard
Rota
Savage
Schellenberger
Sgro
Silva
Simms
Smith
Sorenson
St-Hilaire
St. Denis
Steckle
Strahl
Szabo
Temelkovski
Basques)
Thibault (West Nova)
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Tonks
Turner
Valley
Van Loan
Verner
Volpe
Warawa
Watson
Williams
Wrzesnewskyj
Zed— 249

Goodyear
Graham
Grewal
Guergis
Hanger
Harris
Hawn
Hiebert
Hinton
Ignatieff
Jean
Kadis
Karetak-Lindell
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Laframboise
Lauzon
LeBlanc
Lemay
Lessard
Lukiwski
Lunney
MacAulay
MacKenzie
Maloney
Marleau
Mayes
McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Menzies
Merrifield
Mills
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Nadeau
Nicholson
O'Connor
Oda
Owen
Pallister
Paradis
Pearson
Peterson
Picard
Poilievre
Preston
Rajotte
Redman
Reid
Ritz
Rodriguez
Russell
Scarpaleggia
Scott
Shipley
Simard
Skelton
Solberg
St-Cyr
St. Amand
Stanton
Storseth
Sweet
Telegdi
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Toews
Trost
Tweed
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Vincent
Wallace
Warkentin
Wilfert
Wilson
Yelich

NAYS

Members

Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Black
Charlton
Christopherson
Crowder
Dewar
Julian
Marston
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mathysen
Nash
Savoie
Stoffer

PAIRED

Members

Asselin
Benoit
Malo
Scheer

Bachand
Lalonde
Mark
Tilson— 8

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

[*English*]

The next question is on the main motion.

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, once again I think if you seek it you would find unanimous consent to apply the results of the vote just taken to the motion currently before the House.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

(*Division No. 117*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
Albrecht
Allen
Ambrose
Anderson
Arthur
Bains
Barbot
Batters
Bélanger
Bernier
Bezan
Blackburn
Blaney
Bonsant
Bouchard
Bourgeois
Brown (Oakville)
Brown (Barrie)
Brunelle
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrier
Casson
Chan
Coderre
Crête
Cuzner
Davidson
Del Mastro
Deschamps

Ablonczy
Alghabra
Allison
Anders
André
Bagnell
Baird
Barnes
Beaumier
Bellavance
Bevilacqua
Bigras
Blais
Bonin
Boshcoff
Boucher
Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Bruinooge
Calkins
Cannis
Carrie
Casey
Chamberlain
Chong
Cotler
Cummins
D'Amours
Day
Demers
Devolin

Dhaliwal
Dion
Dryden
Dykstra
Emerson
Eyking
Fast
Fitzpatrick
Fletcher
Freeman
Gagnon
Gallant
Godfrey
Goodale
Gourde
Gravel
Guay
Guimond
Harper
Harvey
Hearn
Hill
Holland
Jaffer
Jennings
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Karygiannis
Keeper
Khan
Kotto
Laforest
Lake
Lavallée
Lee
Lemieux
Lévesque
Lunn
Lussier
MacKay (Central Nova)
Malhi
Manning
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
McCallum
McGuire
McTeague
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Merasty
Miller
Minna
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Neville
Norlock
Obhrai
Ouellet
Pacetti
Paquette
Patri
Perron
Petit
Plamondon
Prentice
Proulx
Ratansi
Regan
Richardson
Robillard
Rota
Savage
Schellenberger
Sgro
Silva
Simms
Smith
Sorenson
St-Hilaire
St. Denis
Steckle
Strahl
Szabo
Temelkovski
Basques)
Thibault (West Nova)
Thompson (Wild Rose)

Dhalla
Doyle
Duceppe
Easter
Epp
Faïlle
Finley
Flaherty
Folco
Fry
Galipeau
Gauthier
Goldring
Goodyear
Graham
Grewal
Guergis
Hanger
Harris
Hawn
Hiebert
Hinton
Ignatieff
Jean
Kadis
Karetak-Lindell
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Laframboise
Lauzon
LeBlanc
Lemay
Lessard
Lukiwski
Lunney
MacAulay
MacKenzie
Maloney
Marleau
Mayes
McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Menzies
Merrifield
Mills
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Nadeau
Nicholson
O'Connor
Oda
Owen
Pallister
Paradis
Pearson
Peterson
Picard
Poilievre
Preston
Rajotte
Redman
Reid
Ritz
Rodriguez
Russell
Scarpaleggia
Scott
Shipley
Simard
Skelton
Solberg
St-Cyr
St. Amand
Stanton
Storseth
Sweet
Telegdi
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Toews

Routine Proceedings

Tonks
Turner
Valley
Van Loan
Verner
Volpe
Warawa
Watson
Williams
Wrzesnewskyj
Zed— 249

Trost
Tweed
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Vincent
Wallace
Warkentin
Wilfert
Wilson
Yelich

NAYS

Members

Angus
Bevington
Blaikie
Chow
Comartin
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Godin
Layton
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Masse
McDonough
Priddy
Siksay
Wasylycia-Leis— 27

Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Black
Charlton
Christopherson
Crowder
Dewar
Julian
Marston
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mathysen
Nash
Savoie
Stoffer

PAIRED

Members

Asselin
Benoit
Malo
Scheer

Bachand
Lalonde
Mark
Tilson— 8

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.
(Bill read the third time and passed)

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

The House resumed from February 19 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion to concur in the fifth report of the Standing Committee on International Trade.

● (1810)

(The House divided on the motion which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 118)

YEAS

Members

Alghabra
Angus
Bagnell
Barbot
Beaumier
Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bevilacqua
Bigras
Blaikie
Bonin

André
Arthur
Bains
Barnes
Bélanger
Bellavance
Bevington
Black
Blais
Bonsant

Private Members' Business

Boshcoff	Bouchard	Cannon (Pontiac)	Carrie
Bourgeois	Brown (Oakville)	Casey	Casson
Brunelle	Cannis	Chong	Cummins
Carrier	Chamberlain	Davidson	Day
Chan	Charlton	Del Mastro	Devolin
Chow	Christopherson	Doyle	Dykstra
Coderre	Comartin	Emerson	Epp
Cotler	Crête	Fast	Finley
Crowder	Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	Fitzpatrick	Flaherty
Cuzner	D'Amours	Fletcher	Galipeau
Demers	Deschamps	Gallant	Goldring
Dewar	Dhaliwal	Goodyear	Gourde
Dhalla	Dion	Grewal	Gurgis
Dryden	Duceppe	Hanger	Harper
Eastler	Eyking	Harris	Harvey
Faille	Folco	Hawn	Hearn
Freeman	Fry	Hiebert	Hill
Gagnon	Gauthier	Hinton	Jaffer
Godfrey	Godin	Jean	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Goodale	Graham	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Gravel	Guay	Khan	Komarnicki
Guimond	Holland	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Ignatieff	Jennings	Lauson	Lemieux
Julian	Kadis	Lukiwski	Lunn
Karetak-Lindell	Karygiannis	Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
Keeper	Kotto	MacKenzie	Manning
Laforest	Laframboise	Mayes	Menzies
Lavallée	Layton	Merrifield	Miller
LeBlanc	Lee	Mills	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Lemay	Lessard	Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Lévesque	Lussier	Norlock	O'Connor
MacAulay	Malhi	Obhrai	Oda
Maloney	Marleau	Pallister	Paradis
Marston	Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	Petit	Poilevre
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Prentice	Preston
Masse	Mathysen	Rajotte	Reid
McCallum	McDonough	Richardson	Ritz
McGuinty	McGuire	Schellenberger	Shipley
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	McTeague	Skelton	Smith
Ménard (Hochelega)	Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Solberg	Sorenson
Merasty	Minna	Stanton	Storseth
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)	Murphy (Charlottetown)	Strahl	Sweet
Nadeau	Nash	Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	Thompson (Wild Rose)
Neville	Ouellet	Toews	Trost
Owen	Pacetti	Tweed	Van Kesteren
Paquette	Patry	Van Loan	Vellacott
Pearson	Perron	Verner	Wallace
Picard	Plamondon	Warawa	Warkentin
Priddy	Proulx	Watson	Williams
Ratansi	Redman	Yelich — 119	
Regan	Robillard		
Rodriguez	Rota		
Russell	Savage		
Savoie	Scarpaleggia		
Scott	Sgro		
Siksay	Silva		
Simard	Simms		
St-Cyr	St-Hilaire		
St. Amand	St. Denis		
Steckle	Stoffer		
Szabo	Telegdi		
Temelkovski	Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les		
Basques)			
Thibault (West Nova)	Tonks		
Turner	Valley		
Vincent	Volpe		
Wasylycia-Leis	Wilfert		
Wilson	Wrzesnewskyj		
Zed — 155			

PAIRED

Members

Asselin	Bachand
Benoit	Lalonde
Malo	Mark
Scheer	Tilson — 8

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

It being 6:15 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

NAYS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen
Allison	Ambrose
Anderson	Baird
Batters	Bernier
Bezan	Blackburn
Blaney	Boucher
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE ACCOUNTABILITY ACT**

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-293, An Act respecting the provision of development assistance abroad, as reported (with amendments) from the committee.

Private Members' Business

● (1815)
[English]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Deputy Speaker: At this time I would like to share with the House the ruling by the Speaker concerning the motions at report stage of Bill C-293, An Act respecting the provision of development assistance abroad.

There are nine motions in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill C-293. Motions Nos. 1 to 9 will be grouped for debate and voted upon according to the voting pattern available at the table. The Chair has also examined these amendments and finds that they do not contain any provisions which would require a royal recommendation.

[Translation]

I shall now propose Motions Nos. 1 to 9 to the House.

● (1820)
[English]

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.) moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-293, in Clause 3, be amended by replacing, in the English version, line 4 on page 3 with the following:

“or”

Motion No. 2

That Bill C-293, in Clause 3, be amended by replacing, in the French version, line 6 on page 3 with the following:

“les organisations de défense des droits de la”

Motion No. 3

That Bill C-293, in Clause 4, be amended by adding after line 16 on page 3 the following:

“(1.1) Notwithstanding subsection (1), official development assistance may be provided for the purposes of alleviating the effects of a natural or artificial disaster or other emergency occurring outside Canada.”

Motion No. 4

That Bill C-293, in Clause 4, be amended by replacing, in the French version, line 22 on page 3 with the following:

“et des organismes de la société civile”

Motion No. 5

That Bill C-293, in Clause 4, be amended by replacing line 25 on page 3 with the following:

“official development assistance as defined by this Act”

Motion No. 6

That Bill C-293, in Clause 4, be amended by replacing lines 26 and 27 on page 3 with the following:

“that meets the criteria in subsections (1) and (1.1).”

Motion No. 7

That Bill C-293, in Clause 4, be amended by replacing line 26 on page 3 with the following:

“that meets the criteria in subsections (1) and (1.1), and”

Motion No. 8

That Bill C-293 be amended by deleting Clause 5.

Motion No. 9

That Bill C-293, in Clause 9, be amended by replacing lines 30 to 35 on page 4 with the following:

“to preparing the report required under section 13 of the Bretton Woods and Related Agreements Act, contribute the following to the report submitted to Parliament under subsection (1):

(a) the position taken by Canada on any resolution that is adopted by the Board of”

He said: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all members in the House and indeed many who are listening for the help that they have given me with this bill. I think this has been a worthwhile effort. It is in an effort to bring accountability to our aid projects, our official development assistance. It is a bit of an example of cooperation among all parties. I think at the end of the day we do have a product that many members will find themselves able to support. I even want to thank government members who from time to time even offered assistance. It is quite a remarkable phenomenon for us in the opposition to have support from government members.

This is about better aid. It is not about more aid.

I just want to offer an observation with respect to a report by a Senate committee chaired by Senator Segal that comments upon our aid in sub-Saharan Africa. The observation, according to news reports, was that we have put somewhere in the order of about \$12 billion into sub-Saharan Africa and it is not observable what it is we actually got for that significant sum of money. The senators' observations in these areas are actually quite acute. I think that this particular bill, assuming it arrives in the Senate, hopefully sooner rather than later, addresses in some small measure the concerns of the senators as they expressed them in their report. I am hoping that the Senate will also see fit to support this bill.

When I started work on this bill, it seemed like a good idea. It was in accord with my own observations that our own official development assistance was not well focused. I thought it was a good bill to put before the House to generate debate and to see how far it went. But last month, I went to Kenya with the member for Halifax, the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour and the member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley. I do not know whether other members have actually had an opportunity to travel in Africa but if they had the experience that we had, they would know that this bill is now a personal matter.

We had met, in some small measure, the actual people this bill would affect. We had personal conversations in the slums of Nairobi with the people this bill would affect. We had personal conversations in West Kenya with the people this bill would affect.

This bill directs that our official development assistance will be directed for poverty alleviation. That will be the litmus test of official development assistance.

At the time, it was pretty hard to look those people in the eye and say that we want accountability and we want this and we want that. It was pretty darned hard because we were meeting some people from an organization called the Jami Bora Trust. These people are street prostitutes. These people are petty thieves. Many of them, probably in the order of 50% of them, have AIDS. They are the poorest of the poor. They simply have no money, nothing that we would constitute as an asset. Yet Jami Bora Trust was willing to lend them money based upon any savings that they had. If they had what we would call \$10 in their bank account, Jami Bora Trust would actually lend them \$20 more. With that \$30, they would open small businesses.

Private Members' Business

It was just remarkable the transformation that those small businesses would make to the lives of those people. They could cease to be prostitutes. They could cease to be petty criminals. They could actually earn enough to buy enough food and to get medications that might be made available to them for TB, malaria or AIDS. It was a remarkable transformation. It was remarkable to see people who, for ridiculously small amounts of money, were able to purchase malaria nets. In some instances, they were given to them free.

• (1825)

We were in a situation with three or four African huts around a compound, just like in *National Geographic*. I can still see this woman looking at me and saying, "Because we have these nets, now my children do not scratch themselves in the morning, they do not get sick and they actually go to school more often". This bill would help with those things.

We went through the Kibera slums and it was quite remarkable. There were three students for one book. At one time it was 15 students to one textbook. Can anyone imagine 15 students to one textbook? With Canada's assistance, that was brought down to three students to a textbook, and obviously a lot more can be done. It is a hugely successful program but that is the kind of thing that this bill could affect.

We went through the Kibera primary school, right in the middle of one of the worst slums of Nairobi, and what we saw were 2,400 students being schooled by 36 teachers. That is the kind of thing we could be doing and the kind of thing we should be doing.

I submit that this bill could make a difference in people's lives, which is why I am urging hon. members to support it.

At this point, we have no legislated mandate or rules on how we spend our ODA funds. I confess that I may be exaggerating somewhat here, but it seems that whoever puts up his or her hand last is the one who gets the project money. This bill would actually give the minister a legislated focus as to how she or he spends our official development assistance funds.

The critical test will be whether the money will go to poverty alleviation and, if the money does go toward poverty alleviation, micro-finance in the slums of Nairobi, bed nets in west Kenya or primary school books in the schools of Kenya, then the minister can say to her colleagues or others that it does fall within our official development assistance mandate.

The point of this bill is to focus our official development assistance on poverty alleviation. I want to ensure that members understand that would not prevent us from providing other assistance. In the amendments, the discussions and the time in committee, we tried to make that as clear as we possibly could. One of the amendments that was read into the record makes it about as clear as possible that this would not prevent the minister or other members of the government from doing precisely that.

Bill C-293 would create a clear mandate that ODA and all ODA funded projects would first need to demonstrate that their objectives include poverty reduction.

The second test is whether the projects take into account the perspectives of the poor. I suppose if a point were driven home to me while I was in Kenya, the perspectives of the poor are extremely important.

The third test is whether they are consistent with international standards.

The criteria for ODA funded projects, however, do not apply in the instances of humanitarian assistance.

• (1830)

This bill has become personal to me because of my trip to Kenya with my colleagues in the House. I can still see the faces of the people who will be affected if this legislation passes.

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade and Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak once again to Bill C-293, An Act respecting the provision of development assistance abroad.

As I said before, the House will find no disagreement from the government on the fundamental principles underlying the proposed legislation. We can all agree that poverty reduction should be a driving value in our aid efforts and that poverty reduction entails a commitment to better health and education, the promotion and protection of human rights, environmental sustainability and equality between men and women.

However, our government believes that poverty reduction means more than just that. Successful poverty reduction also requires strengthened democratic governance in developing countries to ensure that governments protect, respect and promote the rights of citizens. Providing basic health and education is essential but will produce no lasting benefits if a government turns on its own citizens or is incapable of protecting them from lawlessness, crime and corruption.

Our government is implementing programs based on this broader definition of poverty reduction in order to help bring freedom, democracy, human rights, the rule of law, long-lasting development and compassion to those less fortunate. We take this very seriously.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the members of the opposition. Canada focuses its development assistance program in the poorest developing countries and, within those countries, on improving the lives of the poorest and the most vulnerable men, women and children.

There is no doubt that we can do more but doing more also means working smarter to ensure that our aid dollars are spent more effectively, with greater accountability and with clear results for the poor in developing countries.

Our government's commitment to aid effectiveness has been clear from the beginning and is reflected in our determination to focus our aid program and to strengthen our ability to deliver aid effective initiatives, with results commensurate with dollars spent.

Private Members' Business

Our commitment to greater accountability also means demonstrating this effectiveness to Canadians. Starting in 2007, we will publish an annual report on the international development results and that is to be delivered to Parliament and to Canadians. We have a positive story to tell Canadians and we intend to tell it.

However, I fear that the opposition is more concerned about scoring political points with the Make Poverty History campaign than it is about ensuring we pass concrete legislation for our development assistance. This is evident in the bill, a bill that is unclear, lacks ministerial accountability and opens us up to potential legal challenges at almost every turn.

In my speech at second reading, I highlighted some of the difficulties the bill presented, serious concerns that my colleagues and I have tried to address and amend at committee stage. For example, CIDA currently falls under the Foreign Affairs Act, meaning that if no minister of international cooperation is named by the governor in council, the responsibility of the agency falls to the minister of foreign affairs.

This is a legal relationship that already exists. In our committee deliberations on Tuesday, December 12, 2006, at the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, despite efforts by myself and my colleagues to clarify for the opposition members this relationship, the committee voted 7 to 4 to disregard this relationship and create its own definition of the minister.

I have provided for the House merely one example of the confusion the bill creates and the irresponsible actions of the opposition members.

Legislation can help strengthen Canada's development assistance, particularly when the mandate is straightforward and precise, when accountabilities are clear and when reporting on those results is substantive and unambiguous. Legislation that meets these tests can be an enormously powerful instrument for guiding and focusing our aid program.

● (1835)

Bill C-293 fails these tests and, I am sorry to say, was not helped by the actions of many opposition members on the committee.

In our view, Bill C-293 is flawed because it fails to provide a precise, transparent mandate and it encumbers ministers responsible for Canada's aid program with onerous, unnecessary and inappropriate accountabilities that increase administrative burden but do not add value to aid programming. Why should three government departments be asked to table the same information?

The end result is a cumbersome piece of legislation that lacks essential clarity and operational efficiency. The bill is so laden with unproductive restrictions and unnecessary criteria that it would do nothing more than overload the aid program with an administrative and bureaucratic complexity.

There are a number of specific issues with this bill that I wish to touch on.

First, a workable mandate statement must be precise, simple and clear. The mandate statement of Bill C-293 is none of these things.

Instead, it creates a number of overlapping and complex obligations on the aid program.

In our view, the legal requirement that the minister should take into account the perspectives of the poor when disbursing Canadian assistance, begs a question. What would be the test of such a requirement? Not only is it impossible to interpret this requirement but it adds rigidity to an approach that should remain flexible and responsive to local circumstances in developing countries.

That obligation in the proposed mandate statement may impinge upon a process of developing priorities that is usually determined at the country level following consultations with a variety of actors, including people living in poverty. These procedures vary from country to country, depending on the political circumstances and the level of commitment by the government to poverty reduction, human rights and governance framework. They already exist as good practice and should remain as such.

I also wish to discuss the issue of jurisdiction over the aid program. This issue requires very careful review because jurisdictions for Canadian development assistance overlap. We agree that accountabilities for the aid program require careful review but, in our view, the rush to ensure this bill passes into legislation has not given us the time to review and refine ministerial accountabilities regarding the aid program.

Finally, the reporting provisions of the bill remain redundant and confuse ministerial accountability. For example, the named minister is required to report on activities that may not fall under his or her jurisdiction. There are several instances where new reports would merely be a synthesis of material that is already in the public domain. In other words, it is old wine in new bottles.

Finally, much of the reporting asked for is already authorized under the legislation, for example, in the Bretton Woods and Related Agreements Act.

In my view, Bill C-293, despite being worthy in its intent, is highly flawed legislation and should not be adopted because of its many shortcomings. I would remind my colleagues that we will be judged on the international stage by this legislation. I would suggest, if this bill does pass, that as members of Parliament and as legislators in this country we should be ashamed to support such poorly drafted legislation.

● (1840)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ):
Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak this evening on Bill C-293 at the report stage.

Private Members' Business

For the information of our citizens, I will provide the background for this bill. In her report of February 2005, the Auditor General of Canada flagged certain issues pertaining to CIDA management. The report listed the following five criticisms, among others. First, the increased use of grants rather than contributions to finance aid projects is worrisome. Second, CIDA disburses grants in advance of needs. Third, CIDA does not verify in-kind contributions. For example, of 19 files reviewed, 12 mentioned this type of contribution and for 11 there was no indication that CIDA had determined the real value. Fourth, only 3 of 19 agreements analyzed indicated that CIDA had reviewed project costs to ensure that there was no profit. Fifth, CIDA must strengthen its current practices regarding audits because it is possible, among other things, that the agency is refunding unauthorized expenses.

The Auditor General's criticisms indicate that there are significant gaps in CIDA's accountability and transparency and that legislation to that end is required. In addition, over the past 25 years, we have seen a significant reduction in poverty world-wide. With the emergence of new economic powers such as China and India, thousands of people no longer suffer abject poverty and have been able to get an education, live as equals, and relieve their hunger. However, conditions have deteriorated in some countries. We are still a long way from a world where no one goes hungry and where the infant mortality rate is comparable to that in the West. We are still very far from Kofi Annan's reform project. On March 21, 2005, Kofi Annan, then the UN Secretary General, released a report in which he indicated his intention to strengthen the UN. His three major themes were: freedom from want, freedom from fear and freedom to live in dignity.

The Bloc Québécois supports the Kofi Annan project to implement measures that will enable all peoples worldwide to live in freedom from want and fear and to live in dignity. Canada must do its part to make this happen.

That said, the wording of the bill at second reading was a bit confusing. In clause 2, the bill stated that Canadian official development assistance abroad must be provided with a central focus on poverty reduction.

What role does fighting poverty play in development assistance? We know that fighting poverty is a very good way to promote development. However, we would have liked to have seen a provision in the bill that broadened, as much as possible, the definition of the word "poverty". Poverty is not just a money issue; it is also a social issue. That is why we think the UN's millennium goals provide the best framework for working to reduce poverty.

The UN has established eight millennium development goals. The first is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. The second is to achieve universal primary education. The third is to promote gender equality and empower women. The fourth is to reduce child mortality. The fifth is to improve maternal health. The sixth is to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. The seventh is to ensure environmental sustainability. The eighth is to develop a global partnership for development.

The bill addresses only two of the eight goals: fighting poverty and sustainable development. But fighting poverty is more than just

one of the eight goals. As part of his freedom from poverty agenda, Kofi Annan wrote:

We need to see the Millennium Development Goals as part of an even larger development agenda. ... they clearly do not in themselves represent a complete development agenda.

We presented an amendment to that effect to the committee. The amendment stipulated that the fight against poverty take into account related issues, such as health, education and equality.

● (1845)

Our amendment was defeated. All the same, we believe that this bill is a step in the right direction, because it provides a framework for official development assistance by ensuring that it focusses on poverty reduction.

In addition to defining official development assistance, this bill stipulates that assistance must take the poor into account. We firmly believe that any official development assistance must take into account the perspectives of the poor. Such assistance is intended to improve their living conditions and their housing environment, so it makes sense to take into account the perspectives of the very people we are trying to help.

Currently, CIDA is centred in Ottawa. Roughly 80% of CIDA's employees work in the national capital. How can CIDA take into account the perspectives of the poor when most of its employees work in offices in Ottawa? We hope that this bill will pave the way for a reform of CIDA that will decentralize the agency's activities to the countries that receive official development assistance.

There are a number of benefits to adopting such a bill, including the creation of monitoring, accountability and transparency mechanisms. Who can be against that? For example, clause 9 of the bill is designed to ensure that assistance is provided more transparently. It also requires the competent minister to table in the House a report containing the amount the government spends on official development assistance, a summary of any activity or initiative taken under this bill, a summary of the annual report submitted under the Bretton Woods and Related Agreements Act and a summary of CIDA's performance report.

Much of this information is already published. What is new is that all the information would be assembled in a single document, providing a better overview of CIDA's work and Canada's official development assistance. This would facilitate the legislators' work, because it would be easier for them to identify problems and solve them in accordance with this bill.

Private Members' Business

At second reading, Bill C-293 included three clauses, 6, 7 and 8, which were dropped. These three clauses represented the most substantial aspects of the bill. These clauses were dropped because it was thought that they needed a royal recommendation and were therefore out of order. Even without these three clauses, this bill is still important because, as I was saying earlier, this is a step in the right direction and it finally provides a framework for development assistance.

We also expressed some reservations about clause 2.(1) which states that all Canadian official development assistance activities are to be provided in a manner that is consistent with Canadian values. What is meant by "Canadian values"? This is vague and ambiguous. We proposed an amendment to define this term and used the definition on the CIDA site as a reference. Our amendment was approved by the committee. The new definition reads as follows: "Canadian values means, amongst others, values of global citizenship, equity and environmental sustainability".

However, can we even talk about Canadian values? In our view, it would be more fair to talk about the values of Canada's nations. The values of a country are those that stem from the nation or nations that make up that country. As we know, there is more than one nation in Canada.

Given that poverty offers fertile ground for terrorism, urgent action is needed. The time for action has come and then some. The federal government would have to be serious about its desire to alleviate poverty around the world. Yet, both the Liberals and the Conservatives lack the political will to set aside funds for development assistance in the budget. Even if the Conservatives maintain the budget increase for development assistance at 8% annually, this is still not enough of an increase to allow Canada to reach the target of 0.7% of our GNP by 2015.

For more than 10 years, many people have been calling on the government to adopt legislation on development assistance. Today, this Parliament has the perfect opportunity to take action and make a difference.

• (1850)

[*English*]

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak briefly this evening in support of private member's Bill C-293, that is before the House at report stage.

The work that has gone into this bill to bring it to this point is an example of the kind of collaborative effort that often occurs in a positive, constructive way to a much greater degree in a minority government. I want to applaud the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood for having very skilfully led this through the committee process.

Although we are dealing with a private member's bill and no one member is empowered to speak on behalf of all of one's colleagues, it would appear as though the consistent support that was expressed at the committee by the Liberal, Bloc and New Democratic Party members would reflect the support of their respective caucuses.

I am profoundly disappointed to hear the practically wholesale condemnation of the bill, that has now reached the report stage,

coming from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade and Minister of International Cooperation.

It is demeaning and not worthy of the really quite admirable, collaborative, and cooperative effort that has been displayed to describe the motives, which are not actually parliamentary, of committee members who have supported this in good faith and who have indicated they are prepared to support it, to be doing so only to score points with the Make Poverty History campaign. That is actually somewhat pathetic, I must say.

The Make Poverty History campaign was actually launched by Nelson Mandela as a global effort very much supporting the international cooperative effort to support the millennium development goals and to ensure that every single donor country in the world, every country that is as privileged as Canada is to have immense wealth relative to the developing countries, would live up to their international obligations.

The bill that is before us, which has already been noted by others who have spoken, is not about the volume of aid from Canada. In fact, a parallel effort has gone on for almost the last two years to try to get the Government of Canada to deliver at the level of the minimal requirement, the minimal obligation, that has been defined as the sort of international standard of 0.7% of our gross national income for official development assistance.

This bill is about delivering Canada's aid in a more effective, transparent and accountable way. A good effort has been made into the evolution of the development assistance accountability act. This is a third iteration of a bill that goes back, to give credit where it is due, to the former New Democratic member for Churchill who initially introduced the bill. I subsequently did so. There have been refinements and improvements that have come as a result of the good faith effort at committee and as a result of hearing from witnesses. It is extremely disappointing that the government would basically sweep it aside as being completely unworthy.

Having said that, I hope that what we will see at third reading is sufficient support for this private member's initiative to in fact pass in the House. Such is often a possibility in a minority Parliament.

We are talking in this instance about recognizing how much we owe it to Canadians, as well as to the recipients of ODA, to be as effective and accountable as possible in the use of every single last dollar that is intended to go to overseas official development assistance.

• (1855)

To have an accurate picture, in 2005-06 CIDA's authorized budget was \$3.3 billion of which \$3.1 billion was disbursed mainly through grants and contributions. This is not about the amount of aid. It is about having a sense of the volume of aid about which we are speaking. Even though it falls very short of our obligation to 0.7%, it is a sizable sum of money.

If we delivered at the level that Sweden or Finland delivers, we would triple the amount of aid that we contribute now. However, the real issue is about the transparency and the accountability in this instance.

Private Members' Business

I think, as the member for Scarborough—Guildwood has said, anyone who has visited developing countries and has seen the grinding, devastating poverty conditions in which so many women, men and children are living would want to use every possible means we could to make that aid as effective as humanly possible.

We observed these conditions in Kenya. I then had the privilege to spend a week in Uganda at the same time as the member who has sponsored this private member's bill visited Africa with two of our colleagues. We saw children living in the most squalid conditions imaginable, open sewers, no basic sanitation, children who could not possibly remain healthy because of the health hazards. Their living conditions are so desperate that there is no possibility of escaping contamination by TB. We saw families conscientiously trying to use bed nets to prevent their children from suffering from malaria. All of these conditions were crying out for the most effective possible response from donor countries.

Therefore, we should celebrate the fact that a great many witnesses came before our committee. This project started on April 1 of 2003 when we began to really look at our ODA obligations and how we could improve our accountability and transparency as well as meet our obligations at a higher level of ODA.

In the incredible collaborative spirit in which people came together again and again before the committee to plead the case of our doing a more effective job with our aid and also with a more generous allocation of our dollars for aid, I hope the government will reconsider why it would strengthen the message to Canadians and our commitment to the poorest of the poor in the world.

We should pass the bill in this Parliament as a unanimous gesture to say we can do better, we will do more and we will maximize our effectiveness as a generous contributor to overseas official development assistance for those in the world who desperately need our support.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague, the member for Scarborough—Guildwood, on this exceptional bill, Bill C-293, on an issue that I think is of interest to many Canadians.

It deals with international development and how we can make it more effective. Why do we want to do this? As a matter of course to the taxpayer. However, the people we are dealing with are some of the most underprivileged people in the entire world and, quite frankly, it is a matter of life and death for many of them.

I will focus on Africa. Why? Because it is the only part of the world where the social parameters and economies are in decline. It is ironic that 40% of the world's natural resources are in the continent of Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, yet we see the worst cases of poverty on the entire globe.

In the 24 times that I have gone to Africa to work as a physician and engage in other aid and development projects on the ground, I can tell the House, and all of those who have been there know full well, that the people there are the most industrious, caring, compassionate and resourceful individuals. Acts of absolutely breathtaking charity and kindness are exercised by these people in the midst of abject poverty. It is extraordinary to see and humbling, coming from the west.

All the more ironic and heart-rending is the fact that there are massive resources of extraordinary amounts. The tragic irony is some of the poorest people live in the richest countries in the world, with resources of oil, diamonds, gold, minerals, timber and hydro in abundance. Why do we evidence all of these resources on one hand, but on the other hand we see abject poverty?

Let us go through some of the challenges and problems.

First is corruption. Corruption is the cancer that has eroded the continent. The fact that we as western countries have chosen to neglect this is a pox on our houses. We have chosen to neglect the gross excesses of leaders, from Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe to the Angolan government that has massive surpluses from oil, yet it is one of the worst places in the world for children to live. There are areas where there are conflicts, from Darfur to Chad, to the CAR and the Congo. We have seen countries ripped to pieces, innocent civilians caught in the cross-fire between groups that are fighting over resources, in part supported by western interests. We have done absolutely nothing. We have turned a blind eye.

How can we make our aid and development work better? I spoke of the problem of corruption, of a lack of capacity. We have umpteen numbers of solutions and frameworks that take place. We spend millions of dollars and those frameworks go absolutely nowhere. How on earth can we implement a framework if we do not have the people on the ground who have the capacity to execute them? It is an absolutely absurd situation, yet we expect these countries to get on their feet by giving them a framework that they cannot implement. They do not have the resources nor the people to do that. We give them the framework, we walk away and we are happy, with no effect on the ground. That is what we are talking about today.

There is a lack of basic infrastructure, human capacity and basic needs. When conflict arises and is in full force in front of us, when it is entirely possible to prevent those conflicts what have we done? Absolutely nothing. I have mentioned Darfur, Chad, CAR, Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe and the list goes on.

Aid is like a funnel. Money goes in one end and trickles out the other end to the people. Our aid is scattered, unfocused, disorganized, within government, between governments and within countries of need. Can we fix it? Absolutely. This is in no way a mark on the very good people who we have in CIDA. They have been labouring under umpteen numbers of troubles through decades, but we can and we must fix this.

For example, we do not support the partnership branch, which supports the smaller NGOs that do exceptional work on the ground. Rather, we give huge tranches of funds to large international NGOs, and we lose accountability and effect. Again, it is the funnel effect with huge amounts of money through large NGOs, international organizations, with a trickle down to the people on the ground.

Private Members' Business

●(1900)

What can we do? Let us focus on the millennium development goals: 12 countries; primary health; primary education; water security; food security; governance; and anti-corruption work. Let us focus on these six particular areas and we will have an effect.

How do we execute them? From an administrative perspective, we should use the "Three Ones" that has been championed by UN aids, one framework, one implementing mechanism and one oversight mechanism. We can do that with CIDA and through our programs abroad.

When look at health care, which is a particular interest of mine, we should focus on maternal health. Why? If we get maternal health right, we will have our health care personnel, our medications, clinics, water and food. If we affect the maternal mortality statistics, we will know our health care systems are essentially correct and this will affect the entire population.

It is a mistake to focus on a silo mechanism for dealing with health care internationally, for example, A's focus only on antiretrovirals. If we simply deal with diseases as silos, but we do not have the health care personnel, the diagnostics, the treatment facilities, the clean water and the nutrition, how on earth will we have an effect on the ground? How will we affect those parameters and the people who have been ripped to pieces by the worst scourge that has ever affected humanity.

What else can we do? Why do we not take the Canada Corps, which is a moribund, rump of an organization within CIDA. Why not tap into the potential within our own country, Canadians who desperately want to work abroad, both young people and those who are part of the early retirement group? They have the desire, the will, the time and the expertise to do this.

How would this work? The Canada Corps would be the interface between a country and our people at home. Our CIDA people would then be on the ground and they could ask the people what they need. How many nurses, doctors, engineers, judicial experts, agronomists, hydrologists and veterinarians do they need? It then brings a list back to Canada. The corps then asks various groups, such as the Canadian Medical Association, the nursing association, Lawyers Without Borders, Doctors Without Borders, the Canadian Teachers Association, to fill those areas. If we do that, a big gap will be filled. Those people would not only provide care, but they could also teach people in those countries how to be veterinarians, doctors, nurses or agronomists. A long term stable effect would be felt on the ground.

We need to focus on the partnership branch. We need to increase moneys to it and ensure Canadian NGOs are used. They do incredible work on the ground. People here in the House as well as their families are involved in this work.

In the end, the big answer to Africa is the private sector. How can we provide an environment with infrastructure where people will invest in developing countries, an environment where people can use the ample resources for their benefit and not for the benefit of the leaders who swan around in Mercedes-Benzs while their people live in gutters. That is happening right now. We can do this.

I encourage members to look at the example of what Sir Seretse Khama did in Botswana. He was a leader for the continent. He had the resources and he ensured that they were tapped into and his people benefited from that. Despite the fact that Botswana has tragic levels of HIV-AIDS, it has a relatively stable economically, and it is to the credit of Sir Seretse Khama and other African leaders like him who were able to do this.

I encourage the government not to ignore Africa because it is a continent of great hope and potential. It has extraordinary people who can definitely change the course of their future. They do not want handouts. They want a hand up. All they want is the same as all of us. They do not want to be shot. They do not want to be killed. They do not want their children to be abused. They do not want to have a leadership that robs their country blind.

●(1905)

They want to have clean water. They want to have access to clean food that they can get themselves. They want education for their children. They want roads that are clear and free of landmines.

They want a stable playing field, and if we enable them to have that, if we do not give it to them, there will be an opportunity where these people will be able to take care of themselves. They have the internal personal resources. They have the capability to do this themselves. They just want an opportunity.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this subject goes to my heart. When I was a member of Parliament on the opposition side, I was the international development critic and also a member of the standing committee.

I do not mean to say that the essence of the bill and the intention of the member who presented it are wrong, but what really surprises me is that for 13 years the Liberals were in government and could have done all these things they are talking about today. None of them that I can remember sat over here talking about international development assistance. None of them came and told the CIDA ministers about what they are now asking this government to do. We can all make rhetorical statements and we can all make statements about this, but let us look at the record for a minute.

CIDA is a recognized and well respected body around the world. When we went with the member for Halifax to the Scandinavian countries with all the other donor countries, CIDA was recognized as one of the those efficient bodies that does give good aid out there.

The member for Halifax has just stated that we spend \$3.1 billion of CIDA money. With all these things, CIDA has acquired a lot, but yes, there is always room for improvement, and today that is what we should discuss: room for improvement.

The problem here is that nobody is talking about the merits or demerits of the bill. They are talking about international development. They are talking about Africa. Both the member for Scarborough—Guildwood and the member for Halifax talked about their visits to Kenya.

Adjournment Proceedings

That is the country where I grew up. That is the country where I spent most of my life. I have seen CIDA things there. Today they are talking about all this poverty out there. Yes, there is poverty out there, but there are many reasons why there is poverty out there. And yes, CIDA has been working for a long time, but those members stand here and now say that they are so stunned about all these things that are happening in Africa.

Yes, we have been working out there, but that is not the message of this bill. We understand that international development assistance can be delivered effectively. That is what we want to do. We are going to need more transparency, but we want to build on what we have achieved over many years and on what CIDA has done out there in working with Canadian NGOs.

We have excellent expertise here in Canada from the NGO community and from all the other communities that are involved in international development assistance. We need to ensure that we help them become more effective in what they need, but in what we are hearing here tonight, that is not the issue. The problem with this bill is that this is a flawed bill. This bill does not achieve the objective of what the members are saying here today about making poverty history.

Yes, we have been involved in making poverty history. I remember that it was the Conservative government that worked very hard to get Mr. Mandela out and free. Canada has been in the forefront in making poverty history. We all want to make poverty history, but that is not what this bill will do. That is why I want every listener to understand why this government is opposing this bill. This bill is not being opposed because its intent is wrong. This bill is being opposed because it is a flawed bill.

The member for Scarborough—Guildwood and the member for Halifax said they worked countless hours out there. I can tell members from being on that committee that they totally refused to listen to us. They totally refused to recognize that the ministers for CIDA and foreign affairs have gone out and made Canada proud of the contribution of international development assistance.

What we had there was one NGO group shepherding this thing, and even when the departmental officials came and outlined what was wrong with this bill and why this bill would create a tremendous number of problems, including a bureaucracy, and would have no transparency and would impact other areas of international development, the problem was that the members refused to listen.

The member for Scarborough—Guildwood just talked about the Senate report on Africa, which outlined that we need to do more in Africa, as was said. Yes, there are all those things, but the problem is that this bill will not do that.

•(1910)

There are other issues too. Let me tell the House about other areas in which Canada has been involved. Canada has been involved in the global partnership program, to which we have given \$100 million. Canada has been involved in the global peace and security fund, in police training in Afghanistan and in investigating war crimes in Darfur.

Canada's international development assistance takes a bigger picture into account. This bill restricts all those things and creates another level of bureaucracy.

Those members have been members of Parliament for a long time and have been working for accountability as well. I am just flabbergasted that they did not recognize or are refusing to recognize what is wrong with this bill. Whatever they are trying to do will not be accomplished with this bill. That is why the Government of Canada is opposed to the bill.

The Government of Canada is not opposed to making poverty history. The Government of Canada is not opposed to making sure its aid dollars are more effectively spent. As a matter of fact, we have increased our aid budget by 8%. By the year 2010, it will be double the amount in 2001.

My colleague, the parliamentary secretary for international cooperation, outlined the problems with the bill. We wanted to work with the opposition to make the bill effective, but there was an attempt by the opposition to ram it through. When we ram through a bill, it becomes a flawed bill, which is why the Government of Canada cannot support the bill.

I would like to take this opportunity to say—

•(1915)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*English*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for those watching on TV and in the gallery we are starting what in Parliament is called the adjournment proceedings, affectionately known as the late show, a time when members can follow up if they get a poor answer in question period.

As for the parliamentary secretary, I would suggest that he write quickly. I have a lot of questions and I am sure he will answer them, but if he does not, I am sure the media will be quite interested in hearing this.

The question I asked in question period was:

Mr. Speaker, in the last election the centrepiece of the Prime Minister's Arctic sovereignty strategy was a promise to build a deep water Arctic port and a fleet of icebreakers. Several communities are now actively lobbying and preparing construction for this deep water port.

Leaked documents suggest the Conservatives will now only build a refuelling site for naval ships and the construction of six small Arctic patrol vessels that cannot even go in the ice. This is a far cry from a deep water Arctic port and a fleet of icebreakers.

Why is the Conservative government breaking yet another promise and failing to protect our Arctic sovereignty and our northern resources?

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The answer I received from the Minister of National Defence was:
—this is a case where one cannot always believe what one reads.

I guess it is like how one cannot always believe what he reads when the Prime Minister said he would never touch or tax income trusts. I guess one cannot always believe what he reads during an election campaign when the Prime Minister said he would build three icebreakers and a deep water port. We did not promise those icebreakers to get elected, but the government did.

Navy officers confirmed to CanWest News Service that they are indeed proceeding with a plan to build six Arctic patrol ships, not icebreakers.

Can the government tell us at what stage these plans are? What is the cost of these vessels versus the icebreakers? What is the practicality of these patrol ships in north? My understanding is that they cannot even go through the Arctic winter ice.

Last summer, with great fanfare, the minister and the Prime Minister separately toured the north. What information was uncovered in these tours that would apply to the site selection of a deep water port?

Given the government inaction, what led to the cancellation of the deep sea port? Cost? Location? Is it no longer needed because the icebreakers are no longer in government plans?

Why did the government raise expectations across the north about a deep sea port and then disappoint the Arctic communities? These communities do not have a lot of economic opportunities and really had their expectations raised over this potential opportunity.

The government is considering the establishment of forward operating refuelling and berthing sites. Why would that be? If the boats cannot go there at the major time of the year, what is going to be refuelled? If the government is going to do this, where might it be located?

How will these locations be justified if the government has yet to complete mapping of our continental shelf? Is the mapping of the continental shelf on schedule? When will it be completed? When will we have a clear indication of our territorial holdings in the north? I was very proud that we signed the law of the sea and started that Arctic mapping on schedule, as the opposition was asking. It was on schedule when we left government. Is it on schedule now?

A greater armed presence in the north will also mean an air presence. How many search and rescue air force utility aircraft will be stationed north of 60?

It is very serious to make a promise to get elected in an area that needs resources and protection, an area of Arctic sovereignty that all Canadians believe in. I hope the parliamentary secretary here tonight will confirm—

• (1920)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence.

Mr. Russ Hiebert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has asked more questions than can possibly be answered in the few

minutes I have, but I would like to thank him for raising this very important issue.

I welcome the opportunity to share with him and with the viewing audience what this government and National Defence are in fact doing to assert our sovereignty and provide security for Canadians who live in the north.

National Defence is strongly committed to the protection of Canada's security and sovereignty in the north. This is an important part of our Canada First defence strategy.

[*Translation*]

Indeed, during the last election campaign, we promised to make the Canadian Arctic a priority.

[*English*]

Last summer, the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence both travelled to the Arctic to emphasize this commitment. During their travel to Yellowknife, Alert, Iqaluit, Resolute and Goose Bay, they met with the local population and officials to talk about how the Canadian Forces could best serve this vast region of the country.

[*Translation*]

That trip was merely a first step in what will be a sustained effort to improve our ability to better serve Canadians in the north.

[*English*]

National Defence has started to explore options to achieve our goals, including our goal to improve CF surveillance and response capabilities in the northern territories and also to allow our military to better support the government's efforts in asserting our sovereignty and ensuring security in the Arctic.

As part of our efforts to bolster the role of the Canadian Forces in the north, we made the commitment to pursue a three-ocean navy capable of operating in all Canadian waters. Accordingly, the Minister of National Defence asked the Canadian Forces to look at options and make recommendations to enhance our naval presence in the north in a way that is both affordable and effective.

The building of a berthing facility in the Arctic is another key component of our defence plan for the north.

[*Translation*]

On that issue, DND is currently exploring several options and continues to consult other federal departments in the context of this process.

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[English]

In addition, we are currently looking at ways to expand our air force capabilities in the Arctic to meet our needs for an army Arctic warfare training centre and strengthen the Rangers' presence in the region. Developments like the establishment of Canada Command and the recent increase in the duration and frequency of Ranger patrols are certainly promising, but this government knows it needs to do more.

[Translation]

There has been a great deal of discussion concerning our commitments with respect to our northern defence strategy, "Canada First", and I understand that Canadians want to know more about our projects.

[English]

The Department of National Defence is indeed in the process of developing a plan for the Arctic as part of our Canada first defence strategy. Once this plan has been approved by the cabinet, the minister and I will be happy to share the details with the member opposite so that the details can be known to the House and Canadians.

We stand by the commitments we have made to the Arctic. I can assure the House and the member that this government will make good on those commitments.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I will add a couple more questions.

There were no specific numbers in the parliamentary secretary's speech. Given that the U.S. armed forces presence in Alaska sometimes equals the entire Canadian forces, how large a presence in the north is he talking about in his speech? Where will the Arctic training centre for our regular and reserve forces be located and how soon will it come into operation?

I was very happy that the member said during his speech that he will keep Canada's commitment to the Arctic. The Prime Minister said during the campaign that he would build three icebreakers and a deep sea port. I am assuming that when the parliamentary secretary said he will keep the government's commitments, those are the commitments that he has just promised to keep.

• (1925)

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has asked even more questions which I honestly do not believe he is expecting answers to, so I will take them as rhetorical.

There is a question that should be asked of him. Canadians are wondering why the member opposite is so concerned about the need for a strong military presence when he has not objected to the policy of his own leader who advocates for no military presence in the Arctic. In fact, his leader would rather turn the Arctic into a giant national park that could be a place for international scientists to monitor the region.

Could the member opposite explain to Canadians watching why his position is so out of touch with that of his leader?

The Deputy Speaker: Unfortunately, the hon. member for Yukon does not get a chance to answer questions. He was the one asking them.

The hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre.

MANITOBA

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, you may recall that on February 8, in a late show similar to this, the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board characterized the streets in the city of Winnipeg as being full of gangs, guns and thugs.

The next day in the House I had the opportunity to ask the President of the Treasury Board whether he too shared this opinion and in fact he acknowledged that it was his view of Winnipeg, and spoke about my alleged softness on crime.

I am here to ask some questions of the representative of the Treasury Board who is here tonight. I would say that the scope of his comments go beyond normal political discourse. As you and I both know, Mr. Speaker, they truly only serve to hurt the city of Winnipeg in both a business and economic sense, and create a false impression about the safety of Winnipeggers. For partisan political gain I would say that he has abdicated his responsibility as an ambassador for the city.

I would ask him this question. Does he expect the Liberal Party to support bad legislation when he introduces bad legislation, and then chooses to call us soft on crime because we will not support bad legislation?

I ask the President of the Treasury Board, if he was serious about crime prevention, would he accept the numerous studies that say building more prisons does not prevent crime?

I ask the President of the Treasury Board, would he acknowledge that in the United States, which has very much a tough on crime approach, there are over 600 people for every 100,000 incarcerated, whereas here in Canada we have about 107 for every 100,000 incarcerated?

Why would the President of the Treasury Board choose not to showcase the many positive features of the city of Winnipeg? Again, as you and I both know, Mr. Speaker, it has accessible education, a vibrant cultural community, good opportunities for economic growth, and affordable housing, just to name a few.

I ask the President of the Treasury Board, is he aware of the comments of the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce when it said, "When Winnipeg is singled out like this, it does nothing good. It just makes it tougher for us to market the city as a place to live and do business in"?

I ask the President of the Treasury Board, is he aware of the comments of the police spokesperson, Sergeant Kelly Dennison, about the comments on guns, gangs and thugs where the sergeant indicated that they were off the mark. He in fact said, "But to empower the criminal element in our city by claiming they rule the streets is crazy—they're criminals".

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I raise these questions and say to the President of the Treasury Board that in terms of his characterization of the city of Winnipeg, it was irresponsible. It was wrong. Winnipeg is an urban centre. It is no different than any other urban centre that has its share of crime and to paint the city that he is supposed to be an advocate for is absolutely the wrong thing to do.

• (1930)

Mr. Rob Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada recognizes that organized crime, including gang activity, continues to pose a threat to the safety of our streets and communities. The government is taking both legislative and non-legislative steps to counter it.

For example, with Bill C-10, the government is proposing to toughen minimum penalties for serious repeat firearms offences, tailored in a manner that targets the specific problem that currently exists with respect to guns and gangs.

With Bill C-35, the government is proposing to create a reverse onus for bail for those charged with certain serious firearms offences.

With Bill C-27, we are targeting serious dangerous offenders.

I should point out also that Bill C-25 received royal assent on December 14 and ensures that Canada's anti-money laundering regime more fully complies with international best practices.

The Department of Justice officials are currently undertaking a review of our criminal laws to ensure that Canada's legislative measures appropriately respond to threats posed by organized crime.

Of course, strong laws are not by themselves enough to fully combat the threats posed by organized crime. That is why the government has invested in a range of measures designed to prevent crime before it happens.

For example, we committed nearly \$200 million to enhance the ability of our national police force, the RCMP, to combat crime and to keep our communities safe.

We have also invested in crime prevention activities, specifically targeted at youth at risk, and focusing on gangs, guns and drugs.

There are several important reasons why society should be concerned with youth involved in gang activity. Gang members commit a disproportionate number of offences, and commit serious and violent offences at a rate several times higher than youth who are not involved in gangs.

In the 2006 federal budget, the government announced resources in the amount of \$10 million per year to prevent youth crime, with a focus again on guns, gangs and drugs.

Last October, federal officials signalled to the provincial and territorial counterparts that resources were available for communities in need.

To date, several proposals have been received and a number of pilot projects that provide programming for youth involved in or at risk of gang involvement have been funded.

Before closing, I would be remiss not to highlight everything Bill C-10 proposes to do to tackle the specific serious threats that repeat firearms offenders pose to our society.

As members know, in spite of a general decrease in gun crimes, the situation across Canada is not looking all that bright and there is a major cause for concern. Serious gun crimes, such as firearm homicides, gang-related homicides, and the proportion of handgun robberies have increased in a number of our larger cities.

The guns and gangs problem is not a concern only in large urban centres of Canada, it is also a concern in some of the rural and other areas across our country. So, this is something that we, as parliamentarians, have to take very seriously.

I should mention what the opposition has done with the government's bill, Bill C-10, that would have had escalating penalties for individuals who commit offences, gang-related offences, and offences with prohibited or restricted firearms. The legislation would have taken a more serious approach with offenders and had escalating penalties for those who were repeat offenders. Unfortunately, the opposition rejected the government's proposal to provide higher minimum penalties for firearms, traffickers and smugglers.

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Speaker, I am very sorry that the member opposite chose not to make a comment about the city of Winnipeg and the insult to the residents of the city of Winnipeg that was put forward by both the parliamentary secretary and the President of the Treasury Board.

I am also sorry that when he lists the litany of innovations that his government is doing he does not talk about the issues of prevention. He does not talk about the fact that since the beginning of November nobody has responded to Macdonald Youth Services that serves the young people who are on the streets of Winnipeg.

I would like to read into the record a quote from a Winnipeg journalist who said: "Stroking the irrational fear about a crime is political strategy more than anything else and anecdotes are the best way of spreading panic. You don't need to prove anything; you just point out that there is a crime and let everyone's imagination do the rest. It's gotten to the point that the only way to counter what the diatribists are saying is to deny the very existence of crime. Once you acknowledge you can't do that, you've played right into their hands".

• (1935)

Mr. Rob Moore: Mr. Speaker, I do not think the hon. member was listening to my speech because I did say that guns and gang problems were evident in all our large urban centres. I also spoke at length about the resources that we were putting into youth at risk to prevent crime. I believe those specifically addressed two of the issues she just raised.

We have been listening to Canadians and they have told us that they are fed up with violent crime. They have told us about the emergence of this problem and support this government's approach with respect to Bill C-10 that would provide tougher sentences for those who commit gang related crimes or crimes with a firearm.

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We need to do our part to deliver to Canadians what they want and need, and that is meaningful reforms that target the illegal possession and use of firearms by criminal gangs, as well as firearm trafficking and smuggling.

The government has signalled its openness to work with the opposition to ensure that our laws are strengthened in a manner that focuses on the problem. We need to find a way to be successful in our efforts to effectively protect Canadians.

SHIPBUILDING

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Yukon for raising the issue of the promise of the Arctic vessels, the three icebreakers that were promised during the last campaign. I can assure him that I also was excited about this because I was hoping those ships would be built here in Canada and possibly in Halifax.

As a result of my deliberations with people within the navy in Ottawa and Halifax, we will never see three armed icebreakers in the far north. It is not going to happen. Another broken promise by the government. The other promise of course was a 500 man battalion in Goose Bay, Labrador. It is not going to happen.

Regardless of that, my question is on shipbuilding, a question that I had asked on a previous day. The government is currently in negotiations with South Korea and Norway, through the EFTA countries, on free trade agreements.

The NDP cares about our shipbuilding industry. I know there are members of the Conservative Party who care about it as well because it affects their ridings, especially the member from Lévis, Quebec. The reality is that we fear that they will be putting shipbuilding and marine industry on the altar to sacrifice, so to speak, for other trade agreements.

These are the same Conservatives who under Brian Mulroney allowed the Americans the protectionist system of the Jones Act. My hon. colleague, the parliamentary secretary, knows very well what that is. The Americans excluded shipbuilding and the marine industry from the free trade agreement. We were asleep at the wheel and let it happen. Now it appears that the Conservatives once again will be asleep at the wheel and sacrifice our shipbuilding and marine industry for something else.

I want to ask the department some very simple questions. Having a domestic procurement is important and I thank the previous and current governments for some of the promises they have made that these ships will be built in Canada. However, we also need a commercial industry as well in order to be viable. If the yards in our country are no longer viable, then the problem will be that we cannot build, for security measures, our war ships, Coast Guard vessels, laker fleets and ferries because the yards will not be there to build them.

What is the essence here, the fact that down the road we could have another country building our fighting ships? Is this the goal of the government? I hope not. I believe that in its heart of hearts it does not want to see this happen.

Today we had a shipbuilding conference. We brought in members of labour and the Shipbuilding Association. J. D. Irving was present,

for example, and many other people. We came up with some simple recommendations and they are the same recommendations that were presented in 2001. The previous government, unfortunately, sat on that document and never moved.

The Conservative government has now been in power for 13 months and there is no indication of where it will take this very vital industry. From Victoria to Marystown, the workers in those communities have a right to those jobs.

Does the government believe in a viable shipbuilding and marine industry and will it ensure that under no circumstances will this industry be sacrificed in the free trade talks with EFTA and Korea?

● (1940)

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade and Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by thanking my hon. colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore for his interest in the government's efforts to expand export opportunities for Canadian businesses along with the potential impact of trade liberalization on Canada's shipbuilding industry.

The government shares the hon. member's interest. We recognize that some within the ships industry may be sensitive to the removal of Canadian tariffs in the context of our ongoing FTA negotiations with the EFTA countries, those being Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Liechtenstein, as well as with South Korea. This is why we have consulted with and involved all interested stakeholders from coast to coast, including shipbuilders and ship owners since trade negotiations with Korea and the EFTA countries of Europe were first launched.

As a result of these consultations the government has, to the greatest extent possible, reflected industry's concerns in the negotiations. I can assure the hon. member that Canada's negotiators are doing their utmost to effectively address their concerns.

However, it is important that the hon. member also understand that the competitive challenges facing this industry have existed for a number of years and go beyond both these various trade initiatives and trade liberalizations more generally.

I will address how we are dealing with ships in our negotiations in more detail, but first I wish to elaborate on the overall merits of free trade on Canada's economy as a whole.

The hon. member is surely well aware of the importance that trade plays in Canada's economy, contributing to over 40% of Canada's gross domestic product. Indeed, one in five Canadian jobs is supported by trade.

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In Advantage Canada, the government's plan to strengthen Canada's economy and make it more competitive, we made clear our determination to pursue bilateral free trade agreements with targeted countries. Canada is unfortunately lagging significantly behind its key competitors, not having concluded a single FTA since 2001. Since then Canada's main competitors, including the U.S. and the EU, have been aggressive in their negotiations of free trade agreements.

The U.S., for example, has successfully concluded free trade agreements with 15 countries since Canada concluded an FTA six years ago. In fact, Canada is the only significant trading nation in the world that has not concluded a comprehensive free trade agreement in the last five years.

Canada must do more to level the playing field vis-à-vis its competitors. We must ensure that Canadian exporters and investors have competitive terms of access to international markets. We cannot stand idly by on the sidelines while our competitors negotiate FTAs all around us. Canada must do more to bring trade barriers down in order to better position Canadian businesses for success. Canada is very much part of a global economy and it cannot shelter itself from increasing competition nor can it neglect opportunities.

The EFTA countries are developed modern economies that offer significant opportunities for Canadian businesses. Combined, the EFTA countries represent Canada's eighth largest merchandise export destination. An agreement with EFTA would be Canada's first transatlantic free trade agreement and would provide a strategic platform to expand commercial ties throughout Europe.

It would further offer advantages to Canadian businesses over key competitors such as the U.S. and would put Canada on an equal footing with other nations that already have FTAs with the EFTA countries, such as Mexico, Chile, Korea and the EU. A free trade agreement with EFTA countries also offers potential gains for Canadian industry and several industrial and agricultural sectors.

South Korea is another valuable trading partner for Canada and represents a gateway to northeast Asia, a region of strategic importance to global value chains. In 2006 Korea was Canada's seventh largest trading partner, with Canadian exports totalling a record \$3.3 billion. A free trade agreement with Korea would offer the possibility of enhanced market access for a wide range of Canadian goods, services and investment opportunities—

The Deputy Speaker: The time has expired. The hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore.

• (1945)

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, one of the problems with these late shows is that the parliamentary secretary usually reads from

some bureaucratic notes. The parliamentary secretary did not answer the question, so I will ask him again. It is a simple question. Does the government believe in a viable shipbuilding and marine industry in Canada, yes or no?

We heard him also talk about other opportunities for agriculture and other industries. This leads us to believe that the Conservatives are indeed going to sacrifice the shipbuilding and marine industry in this country.

We know very clearly that Norway subsidized her industry for many, many years. We know that Korea did the same. We know the United States protected its industry. Why can the government not protect the men and women who work in these yards from Victoria to Marystown and provide the leadership that they need to ensure that their families will not have to be sacrificed so that other industries can benefit from these useless free trade deals that are not fair in any way, shape or form?

Does the parliamentary secretary believe, on behalf of the government, in a viable shipbuilding and marine industry in this country?

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, let me reiterate that we have been very upfront about these negotiations and have consulted every step of the way with interested stakeholders, including the Canadian shipbuilding industry. These comprehensive consultations have been very helpful in shaping Canada's negotiating position with all of our partners.

Let me reiterate that negotiators are addressing Canadian sensitivities through provisions such as longer tariff phase-out periods, product-specific rules of origin that reflect industry concerns, and no changes to the government's ability to procure ships through Canadian shipyards. On this last element let me be very clear. The government is working on a renewed approach to shipbuilding to help ensure, for example, that the ships purchased by the federal government are built in Canada where competitive conditions exist.

We are working toward comprehensive agreements that include tariff elimination for all non-agricultural products and a range of agricultural products, while also—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 128 (1).

(The House adjourned at 7:47 p.m.)

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