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(HANSARD)

Tuesday, April 28, 2015

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, April 28, 2015

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)
[English]

AUDITOR GENERAL OF CANADA

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I have the honour to lay upon the table the spring 2015 report of the Auditor General of Canada, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(g). This document is deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HEALTH

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the tenth report of the Standing Committee on Health, entitled “The Statutory Review of the Pest Control Products Act, 2015”.

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PETITIONS

PUBLIC SAFETY

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

The first petition relates to the bill currently before this House, Bill C-51.

Petitioners from Saanich—Gulf Islands as well as Whitehorse and Mississauga wish this House to reject Bill C-51 as a dangerous bill that intrudes on constitutional rights.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from residents of Saanich—Gulf Islands who are concerned about the proposal for what is described as the northern gateway pipeline.

The petitioners call on this House to ensure that support for this project from the Conservative administration be withdrawn.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition to the Government of Canada on the proposed Kinder Morgan pipeline expansion of the new pipeline running from Edmonton to Burnaby. The signatories object to this pipeline and ask the Government of Canada to immediately act to prevent this new oil pipeline from proceeding through Burnaby.

The reasons are numerous. For example, the petitioners state that the pipeline would only create 50 permanent full-time jobs and would most likely be built using temporary foreign workers. Also they are upset that this new pipeline would not bring oil to be refined in British Columbia or be sold to Canadian consumers but instead would be shipped by tanker to foreign markets.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present petitions on behalf of constituents in Scarborough—Rouge River who understand the struggles because of gridlock and the importance of the creation of a public transit strategy nationally in this country. Canada is the only OECD country that does not have a national public transit strategy, and it is estimated that over the next five years, there will be an \$18-billion gap in transit infrastructure needs.

The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to enact a Canada public transit strategy that seeks to provide permanent investments to support public transit; to establish federal funding mechanisms for sustainable, predictable, long-term, adequate funding for public transit; and to ensure that all levels of government are working together.

GENDER SELECTION

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

Two of them are on gender selection abortion.

The petitioners call for equal treatment for males and females before birth, asking that the practice of aborting those fetuses determined to be female because they are female be ended.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the third petition is with regard to displaced Christians in Iraq.

The petitioners call on our government to continue to pay careful attention and to do what we can to help displaced Christians in Iraq.

The Budget

PALLIATIVE CARE

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this petition deals with palliative care.

Recognizing that hospice and palliative care is an essential component of national health systems, the petitioners ask the Government of Canada to call for the inclusion of hospice and palliative care in the United Nations' sustainable development goals.

DEMENTIA

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition today from dozens of residents of the Lower Mainland of British Columbia from Delta, Richmond, Surrey, and Burnaby.

These petitioners call on the Minister of Health and the House of Commons to pass Bill C-356, sponsored by the member of Parliament for Nickel Belt, to put in place a national dementia strategy, including a comprehensive national plan to address all aspects of Alzheimer's disease and to ensure that we have national objectives to fight what for many people is one of the profound health issues in our country.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE

The House resumed from April 22 consideration of the motion that this House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government and of the amendment.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, from the outset I would like to let you know that I will be sharing my time with my hon. colleague from Hochelaga.

I am very grateful for the opportunity to speak today on this budget and on the NDP amendment. So many times in the House we have seen the movement of closure and time allocation, so I have not been able to speak on all of the motions and bills before the House, and I am very grateful that I have this opportunity today.

In an age of growing inequality, it seems that the Conservatives just want to help accelerate it. In Scarborough, my office hears about the need for jobs, the need for affordable and reliable transit, and the need for fairer immigration policies, among many other issues. Across Canada, communities are struggling to cope with major job losses.

In Scarborough, we are a fast-growing community. In 2011, there were about 616,000 people living in Scarborough. As an area, our average household income is below the provincial average, and so is per capita income. There are many people struggling to make ends meet in our community. We have many small and medium-sized businesses that are the real job creators. We have been waiting for a budget that meets our needs and priorities, but frankly, this is not the budget we need.

Canada's economy is not strong without a strong middle class, and Scarborough is home to many in the middle class. From this budget, it is clear that the Conservatives either do not understand the realities of middle-class Canadians or just do not care. Instead of taking action to help Canadians get ahead, the Conservatives are stubbornly pushing their schemes that would help only the richest 15% of Canadians.

The Conservatives simply do not understand the priorities of Scarborough and the priorities of Toronto. This region has lost hundreds of thousands of good manufacturing jobs, yet the Conservatives have offered the bare minimum of support for manufacturing and have failed to build a balanced economy. Toronto alone has lost 24,600 jobs in the last six months and nearly 100,000 manufacturing jobs since the Prime Minister took office. The Conservatives have failed to build a balanced economy that works for our city.

Looking at the budget, it is clear that it would not address our city's looming affordable housing crisis either. It would fail to extend funding for social housing. The \$150 million in the budget would not address the scope of the challenges facing our cities. Right now, there are 167,022 people on the City of Toronto's affordable housing wait list. Our city is committed to working on social housing, but it needs federal support to meet this glaring need.

However, something we do see in this budget is the government's income-splitting scheme, which the former finance minister, Mr. Flaherty, strongly opposed. Financial experts have warned that 85% of Canadians would get nothing at all from the Conservatives' income-splitting scheme, yet this is what the government has put forward. This wasteful and unfair policy would take billions from middle-class Canadians, who need the help the most, and hand it over to the richest 15%. This makes no sense at all when one in two Canadians lives paycheque to paycheque and countless others work full time but still fall below the poverty line.

For ten long years of the Conservative government, we have seen billions dumped into tax giveaways to the largest corporations and tax loopholes for CEO salaries. With rising inflation rates and storm clouds looming for our economy, most of us would not benefit from this income-splitting scheme, which is really there just for the wealthy few, or from the doubling of the TFSA limit, or from the tax loopholes for CEOs. These would not benefit most Canadians.

The Budget

Where are the measures in this budget that support middle-class Canadians? We know that people are going to need strong supports if this storm materializes and our economy faces a further downturn.

We could benefit from closing the tax loopholes to fund the recent commitment to eliminate child poverty. My motion to eliminate child poverty was supported almost unanimously here in the House, but we do not really see any measures in this budget that work toward that goal.

Unfortunately, this budget continues the \$700-million loophole for CEOs to avoid paying taxes on stock options, forcing ordinary Canadians to pay more.

We could provide a helping hand for parents looking for child care, return the retirement age to 65 from 67 for Canadian seniors, and create a \$15 minimum wage so that people have more money in their pockets and support they can rely on.

• (1010)

I must mention some of the victories, which are measures that are actually good in this budget. I am pleased to see that NDP proposals, which the Conservative government voted down in the House already, have now, of course, shown up in the budget. These are measures such as decreasing taxes on small businesses, increasing the time working Canadians dedicate to caring for their ill loved ones, stimulus for investment in manufacturing, and extending basic workplace protections for interns. I am also glad to see the government act on the NDP proposal to extend the accelerated capital cost allowance for manufacturing investments and new equipment.

It is great that any of the positive measures in this budget are really all NDP proposals. This demonstrates to Canadians that clearly we are ready to be the government and should just write the entire budget next time around.

Small businesses have watched their tax rate drop 1% since the Conservatives took office, to 11% from 12%, while watching the corporate tax rate drop 7%, from 22% to now 15%, which included a now defunct surtax, over the same period. This budget proposes to drop the small business tax rate by 2% by 2019, which is exactly what the NDP had proposed, but the Conservative government voted against it. It would bring the tax rate for small and medium-sized enterprises from 11% to 9%. Nevertheless, it is good to see the government adopting another NDP proposal.

We also believe in extending basic workplace protections for interns, and I commend the government for supporting this NDP initiative also. Again, I wonder why the government just recently voted down the same measures in my New Democrat colleague's private member's bill, but it is what it is.

The Conservatives have brought forward the NDP proposal for seniors for registered retirement income funds, RRIFs, and have reduced the amount seniors must withdraw from their RRIFs so that they are not forced to deplete dangerous amounts of their savings.

However, the Conservatives have broken their word to seniors on pensions, and this budget shows no sign of their changing course. The current government plans to raise the retirement age for old age

security from 65 to 67, and the Conservatives have blocked progress to boost CPP and QPP benefits.

Finally, the budget accepts the long-time NDP proposal on the employment insurance compassionate care benefit that would extend it from six weeks to six months, which will begin in January 2016. I am very happy to see another NDP initiative brought forward in this budget.

However, I would be remiss if I did not mention at this point that access to employment insurance has dropped to historic lows following cuts by the current Conservative government, leaving many Canadians unemployed and unable to get the support they need. Sadly, this budget does nothing to ameliorate that situation.

I also believe that this budget is short-sighted at a time when Canada needs vision. What are we passing on or leaving behind to future generations?

The Conservatives plan to double the annual contribution limit for the tax-free savings account to \$10,000. This is another unfair scheme that only helps the rich. Most Canadians can only dream of those kinds of savings. Worse yet, this measure will cost Canadians \$20 billion over the next four decades. The response from the Minister of Finance that our grandchildren will deal the problem is simply unacceptable. It is not responsible to burden our grandchildren with this \$20-billion problem just because this government wants to create another venue for their wealthy friends to put away more money. I wish the Minister of Finance thought of the vast majority of people living in Toronto who just cannot afford to part with \$10,000 every year.

According to one of the new reports from the Metcalf Foundation, authored by one of my constituents, John Stapleton, on the working poor, 63 of Toronto's census tracts show an increase in working poverty rates between 2006 and 2012, while only 14 show a decrease. In 2012, the report noted, there was a major deepening of the incidence of working poverty in census tracts for the northern parts of Toronto, representing a constituency that is only north Scarborough. This is very concerning for me and the constituents I represent.

I would have liked to have had more time to go through more issues, such as gridlock and more instances of poverty. I hope someone will follow up with that in the questions and answers.

• (1015)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Scarborough—Rouge River on her speech, which pertained directly to her community and raised very specific things about this budget that we condemn, namely, the fact that this government's priorities are completely out of touch with the reality of Canada's middle class.

The Budget

The government seems to have stolen its ideas from our platform—yes, we are prepared to take office—even though we have to admit that those ideas will benefit Canadians. What is more, our ideas seem to be the only good things about this budget.

Could my colleague elaborate on that?

•(1020)

[English]

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is right. Any of the good initiatives that we see in the budget are strictly taken from NDP proposals that we have made public over the last many years and which we have been working on for many years. It adds to the proof that when we combine all budgets at the federal, provincial and territorial levels, the NDP has balanced the budget more often than any other party. The Conservatives are now promising balanced budget legislation but those are just words coming out of their mouths. As usual they are saying, “Please, believe us. We are going to do better”.

Our country deserves better. That is what the NDP is doing. We are going to continue fighting for Canadians. The presentation of this budget goes to prove that the NDP is the only party that is standing up and fighting for middle-class Canadians.

New Democrats are ready to form government. We are ready to write the budget next time around.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague would have liked to speak about infrastructure and public transit, but she did not have the chance to do so. I would like to give her that opportunity because I think she agrees with me that the budget is seriously lacking when it comes to infrastructure and public transit, particularly for a city such as Toronto.

[English]

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Mr. Speaker, gridlock costs Canadian cities billions of dollars each year. Earlier, I presented a petition which says that Canada is the only OECD country that does not have a national public transit strategy. We know there will be a gap of \$18 billion over the next five years with respect to infrastructure needs.

The NDP proposed a bold urban plan for permanent, stable and predictable funding for public transit. The Conservatives talk the gridlock game, but they do not really do anything. Their scheme is filled with so much red tape that the municipalities will not even be able to get their hands on the money they desperately need to invest in our crumbling cities.

In Toronto, bridges and roads are crumbling and are literally falling on top of cars that are driving below them. In Scarborough, we are so reliant on buses in our community. In Scarborough—Rouge River and north Scarborough we are reliant on surface level buses only. The Conservatives are continuing to leave people in Scarborough waiting on the streets for buses.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's comments today, most of which I agree with.

One of the things we in the Liberal Party have noticed concerning the budget is the total lack of focus on something that is incredibly

important, which is economic growth. As we know, in January our economy actually contracted. We heard the Governor of the Bank of Canada's comment about an atrocious start to the year. The CIBC said that we have the worst job quality in 25 years. The numbers are still pretty high on unemployment.

What would the NDP propose in terms of growth? I know New Democrats consider it to be an important aspect of the budget.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Mr. Speaker, we know that the economic growth projections have actually been downgraded. The budget is balanced in 2015, but persistent weak economic growth has dramatically reduced the expected surpluses.

The Minister of Finance touts that there will be a surplus and that he is investing it in communities and our seniors, but really we do not see that. We need to make sure that we are investing in our small and medium-sized enterprises even more. The government has continued to give away tax breaks and create loopholes for the large, already profitable corporations and CEOs instead of actually investing in our small and medium-sized businesses that are the economic engines of our local communities and the ones that are really creating jobs in our communities. The Conservatives are not really investing in them.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again, I am disappointed with the budget the government has presented.

I thought that in an election year, the Conservative government might throw people who are less fortunate a bone to try to win their votes. However, much to my dismay, the 2015-16 budget offers them nothing. In reality, I am not surprised. Those people are not the Conservatives' target demographic.

Again today, I am going to talk about issues that are very important to me and were overlooked in the budget: housing and homelessness.

I want to set the record straight right away on the fight against homelessness. The word “homelessness” appears only three times in Canada's economic action plan for 2015, and in all three cases, the budget refers to announcements that have already been made. The Conservatives are just repeating old announcements that were made two years ago and were not even good news then.

The first mention is to remind Canadians that in 2013, the government renewed only part of the funding for homelessness. Personally, if I had made cuts to an already insufficient amount of funding two years ago, I would not remind everyone of what I had done. The other two instances where the word “homelessness” appears remind Canadians that the government unilaterally changed the way the homelessness partnering strategy works, to focus on the housing first approach.

Since this approach was adopted at the time of the last call for proposals, it has become clear that directing all the funding to one area has had serious consequences: many groups that provide front-line services are realizing that they will no longer be eligible for funding that they have been receiving for years now.

The Budget

Many essential services provided to the homeless through a variety of approaches, including prevention measures, are simply disappearing. How short-sighted this government is being. It would have been better if the Minister of Finance had said nothing at all, rather than rubbing salt in the wound.

I would now like to shift the discussion to housing, a subject that is extremely important to the NDP, although clearly, it is not something that the Conservatives put much thought into.

Through some accounting gymnastics and by manipulating numbers and language, the Minister of Finance tried to make it look like he was actually following through on what the NDP has been calling for for years, implying he would stop cuts to social housing when the long-term agreements between social housing providers and CMHC expire.

Let us set the record straight: no new funding for social housing has been announced, beyond what had already been invested in previous years, and I think the budget has even been cut. I will come back to that in a bit.

The budget plays with words and throws numbers around to create confusion among housing groups. However, some of those groups are beginning to realize the extent of the trickery and have contacted my office to confirm their fears.

In addition, as recently as last Friday, FRAPRU used social media to send the message that contrary to what most people thought they read in the federal budget presented last Tuesday, there are no new investments to maintain the \$1.7 billion in funding in the long term. This funding helps subsidize 568,600 social housing units in Canada, including 125,500 in Quebec. I cannot believe a Canadian government would stoop so low.

The estimates in table 4.2.1 of the budget speak for themselves. The only new amount is \$150 million in relief over four years to allow co-operative and non-profit social housing providers to prepay long-term, non-renewable mortgages held with Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation without penalty. Many of those mortgages were taken out at interest rates in the neighbourhood of 20%. This will enable providers to undertake necessary renovations or help their lowest-income tenants.

This ministerial decision too is at least two years old. I supported the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada's call for this and hounded the ministers about it a few years ago. Finally those groups were successful.

Imagine this: when a social housing provider wanted to negotiate a mortgage with a credit union, for example, at the best interest rate on the market, CMHC forced them to pay a penalty equalling the total residual interest, which was a huge sum of money.

The \$150 million the government is offering to help groups get out of their mortgages without paying that penalty was framed as an investment, but I think it is actually a cut.

When the minister made that decision several years ago, no cap was set.

•(1025)

Now, we are talking about a maximum of \$150 million over four years, which will not be available for another year and will be broken down as follows: \$50 million in 2016-17, \$50 million in 2017-18, \$25 million 2018-19, and \$25 million in 2019-20.

What happens if this is not enough money to help all the social housing groups that want to break their mortgage with CMHC without paying the penalty? As I was saying, there never used to be a limit. Now, there will be a maximum of \$50 million for the next two years and a maximum of \$25 million for the following two years. This seems more like funding cuts than new funding.

There is tremendous need for housing across the country. Twenty-five years from now, the \$1.7 billion allocated to social housing will have completely disappeared. The 570,000 social housing units and as many families currently receiving federal funding might end up in hot water. What is more, according to the most conservative estimates, more than 300,000 housing units are in jeopardy in Canada.

I have a few tangible examples of the repercussions of the Conservatives' inaction on social housing. In my riding, Hochelaga, Carole Parent, a resident of the Odyssee housing co-operative, whose long-term agreement is ending in the next few months, will see her currently affordable rent go up by \$200 a month. Ms. Parent is unable to hold a job because of her physical condition, and she cannot afford to pay this new rent. What is she to do?

What do the Conservatives have to offer other people across Canada who, like Ms. Parent, will no longer be able to pay their rent when their social housing provider is no longer able to subsidize them and will have to increase the rent?

•(1030)

[English]

I have another example, but this time in Ontario. In 2013, the executive director of the Native People of Sudbury Development Corporation came to me to testify about a situation that occurred in his community. That October, two Sudbury families had to move out of their apartments because their rent had jumped from less than \$400 a month to more than \$900 a month. The housing provider had to rent the apartments at market price in order to pay the bills. That meant the loss of two more social housing units.

Those are just a few examples of what is happening right now, and the worst is yet to come.

[Translation]

The government continues to repeat the same scripted lines to the effect that their budget is a good thing for those less well off. Instead of announcing measures that will only benefit a small part of the population, Canada's rich, the federal government could easily help low-income families and make life more affordable for the middle class by ensuring that housing is actually affordable in Canada.

The Budget

Investing in social housing by spending the amounts saved when the long-term agreements expired on maintaining rent subsidies for families in need, helping social housing providers pay for renovations and contributing to the construction of new units would at least be a start that would not affect the current budget.

When we, the NDP, win the next election and form the Government of Canada, we will work with the provinces, territories, municipalities, first nations, housing providers and groups in civil society to achieve that goal. We have to ensure that everyone has adequate, affordable and sustainable housing.

Housing is an important determinant of health. Money spent on housing is an economic and social investment. In the medium term, it would reduce government spending on health, public safety and justice. Truly affordable housing where tenants and owners would not have to spend more than 30% of their income on shelter would allow them to invest in other sectors of the economy by buying better quality food or a public transit pass to go to work, or by investing in their children's education.

Canada is a party to international treaties recognizing that housing is a right. We must now put words into action. Cities and communities across Canada need the federal government to be a stable and long-term partner in housing.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague. She focused primarily on social housing, which is extremely important, but I know that homelessness is also important to her, and it is to me as well.

I would like to ask her what she thinks about the government's attitude towards the homelessness partnering strategy. The government does not seem to realize that homelessness will, tragically, be around for many years. In fact, the problem is even growing. Furthermore, the agencies that work in this area and could help the homeless need predictable, long-term funding instead of last-minute, piecemeal funding. Of course, this would require a good relationship between the provincial and federal governments. They need to talk to each other.

What does my colleague think about homelessness and long-term funding to combat homelessness?

•(1035)

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question on an issue that is close to my heart.

As I said earlier, in budget 2013, the Conservatives renewed the budget for the homelessness partnering strategy, but they reduced the amount. The budget had not been indexed since it was created, which means that the budget had been going down and then it was actually cut in 2013. There is not enough money.

Then, the Conservatives came up with the new housing first approach. I completely agree that we need more housing. I mentioned that. However, this approach only helps one group of people: people who are in desperate need of housing and who experience chronic or episodic homelessness. The approach does absolutely nothing to address hidden homelessness or to prevent homelessness. This is a short-term vision, since the budget was renewed for five years instead of for a longer period.

Furthermore, if we give food to people who have to choose between paying the rent and paying for food, for example, we could prevent them from ending up on the street. We must not wait for people to end up on the street before we provide assistance. It shows our humanity when we help prevent people from ending up on the street instead of helping them only after they are already there.

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the voice of the people of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord in Ottawa, I would like to quote Sonia Côté, coordinator at Loge m'entraide, an organization that represents low-income people who are looking for affordable housing. In response to the federal budget, Ms. Côté said:

This is another slap in the face from the [Prime Minister's] government to poor tenants who, over the next few years, will lose the subsidies that currently allow them to spend 25% of their income on housing. Overlooking them like this is a totally inhumane thing to do.

In light of Ms. Côté's expertise in the area of affordable housing, does my NDP colleague agree with what she said?

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, Ms. Côté, much like Mr. Saillant from FRAPRU, is in a very good position to know what is happening on the ground.

Every time I ask the Minister of State for Social Development a question about the agreements expiring, I get the same answer. She tells me that the agreements have expired and that these groups should be able to help people who cannot afford to spend more than 25% to 30% of their income on housing. However, this does not reflect the reality. Expenses have gone up faster than incomes. There are a number of housing co-operatives, for example, that are currently in a very difficult financial situation. We have had to download this onto the provinces. In its most recent budget, the Quebec government, for instance, offered assistance to groups whose funding is expiring, but only for two years.

Is that what the federal government wants to do? It is in a much better position to support housing than the provincial governments are. It is absolutely critical that the federal government do not abandon its support for social housing.

[English]

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am certainly honoured to rise in the House today to speak to the budget, economic action plan 2015. Before I get started, I want to indicate that I will be splitting my time with the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, who has graciously let me go first so I can get to a committee meeting that I must chair.

Each year, we gather in this House as a matter of tradition and obligation to recognize the importance of planning and of creating the conditions that ensure that this country will continue to be the greatest place in the world to live and to work. I can assure members that this country is the greatest place in the world to live and to work.

The Budget

Time and again, we are confronted with the challenges of uncertainty, risk, and change. This year, our way of life and security was threatened, presenting us with a new, albeit equally important, challenge. I am proud to stand behind a government that has consistently responded to all of these challenges with the same quality leadership.

In this year's budget, we continue to exhibit the leadership Canadians deserve by staying true to the principles that put us in government in the first place: supporting hard-working Canadian families, supporting small business, and consistently daring to innovate and grow our economy in ways that make Canada a world leader. Today, I will spend the time I have, speaking about these three parts of the budget and how they combine to offer a strong vision for what this great nation can be in 2015 and in the years to come.

Supporting hard-working Canadian families is where my journey as a member of Parliament began and it is where I begin today. Central to my values is a belief in the importance of community and the importance of family. One of the unique aspects of this country rests in the Canadian family unit. Moms and dads working equally hard to pay for daycare, put their oldest through another year of university, pay for activities like hockey and dance, and eventually pay off the mortgage on their first home make up a snapshot of what it means to raise a family here in Canada. I know that raising a family is hard work, and I believe that any investment in Canada's future means investing in ways to help our Canadian families. Simply put, measures introduced by our government in this budget would make life more affordable for every single Canadian family with children across this country.

Increasing and expanding the universal child care benefit, or the UCCB, to provide every family in Canada with an additional \$720 per child under the age of 18, and introducing the family tax credit, are two out of many ways in which we plan to help support raising a family here in Canada. All in all, this budget would ensure that the average Canadian family of four gains average benefits of more than \$6,600 every year. One of the most important aspects of these benefits is that every single Canadian family would receive them.

Part of why I am so proud to stand here in the House today in support of the economic action plan 2015 comes from this budget's recognition that no two families have the exact same needs. It is through accepting this reality that we as a government have taken seriously our duty to introduce programs and policies in the 2015 budget that would help all families and would leave the most important decisions to the true experts, which happen to be moms and dads. Great examples of such programs lie in our continued support for benefits such as the children's arts tax credit and the children's fitness tax credit, which promote the importance of arts and fitness programming among children through credits of up to \$500 and \$1,000 respectively.

Additional programs such as the first-time home buyers' tax credit, the expanded home buyers' plan, and the public transit tax credit would help Canadian families with the process of buying or building their first home. No matter what stage a family is at or where it needs most help in shouldering its expenses, this government has made it clear that it will be there for Canadian parents and their kids.

Building on the base of the family, this government has committed a great number of resources in this year's action plan to provide communities across Canada with the infrastructure and support they need to continue providing the high quality of life that Canadians should expect.

The new building Canada fund is a key example of one of these investments to the community, earmarking \$5.35 billion per year for provincial, territorial, and municipal infrastructure. Another is the creation of the new public transit fund that would ramp up to \$1 billion a year to reduce urban congestion and gridlock in Canada's largest and dynamic cities. It is one example that comes to mind. Under the \$33 billion building Canada fund launched in 2007, we supported more than 12,000 infrastructure projects from coast to coast to coast, and we would continue to support projects that make up our communities' great spaces in which to raise families.

To me, part of taking pride in the strength and the resilience of community is tied to taking pride in the businesses that are rooted in communities. Making up over 90% of Canadian businesses and employing two-thirds of all Canadians, small businesses are an essential part of what makes our Canadian communities so great and unique. Our communities grow, and this is something I have believed to be true for my riding since first being elected in 2004.

• (1040)

This government believes in small businesses, and therefore wants them to not only grow but prosper and triumph. That is why, since forming government, we have reduced the small business tax load by almost 50%, and in this budget we would continue to invest in small-business owners throughout this nation.

Part of this investment is through our slashing EI premiums for small businesses through our small business job credit. This credit would be effective for two years, beginning in 2015, and available to employers paying \$15,000 or less per year in EI premiums, so that is approximately \$570,000 in EI assessable payroll in Canada. The net result of applying this credit would be a 15% reduction in employment insurance premiums paid by small businesses over the next two years and roughly \$0.5 billion in savings from small firms and payroll tax cuts.

The CFIB has commended measures like these that make it easier to hire new workers or invest in additional training to help Canadian entrepreneurs grow their businesses.

The Budget

Feedback such as this drives our government to work even harder to help small businesses where we can. In this year's budget we continue to commit to the following: reducing the small business tax rate from 11% to 9% by 2019, allowing small businesses to do what they do best, invest in their companies and create jobs; improving access to financing for Canadian small businesses under the Canada small business financing program, which since 2006 has provided more than 50,000 loans to help new businesses get started and expand; increasing access to venture capital financing to help innovative, high-growth companies grow and create jobs.

Accompanying these measures, this year's budget would enshrine into policy what has been made clear through the Red Tape Reduction Commission in its finding that needless red tape kills jobs and growth for small business. Cutting the red tape burden by eliminating more than 800,000 payroll deduction remittances to the Canada Revenue Agency, made every year by more than 50,000 small businesses, marks a step towards jobs and growth for small business owners. Pairing this policy with the freeze on EI premiums demonstrates a winning strategy for small businesses and their ability to gain the certainty and flexibility that they need, to continue being key parts of Canada's economic success story.

It is measures like these that allow for small businesses to gain support, stay competitive, thrive, and prosper. An important part of leading Canadian small businesses towards paths of success is ensuring that their paths towards success are not stifled by red tape and raising the capital necessary to grow.

It also means, most importantly, investing in the futures of Canadian entrepreneurs. We take seriously the need to invest in tomorrow's best and brightest small business owners by allocating substantial resources to the future of entrepreneurs in Canada.

Economic action plan 2015 would support entrepreneurship by investing substantial resources into internships in small business and supporting leaders in the promotion of entrepreneurship, such as the Canada Youth Business Foundation.

By investing \$15 million for up to 1,000 post-secondary graduates to intern in small and medium-sized businesses across Canada, and further providing \$49 million to the CYBF, this budget would create the supports needed to make sure that Canadian entrepreneurs are part of the unique success story emerging from this great nation post-recession.

Strongly tied to entrepreneurship and what is perhaps the most important part of this budget is the vision it articulates for research and innovation. This budget would make substantial investments in world-class research and innovation by providing more than \$1.5 billion in funding over five years to advance the government's renewed science, technology, and innovation strategy.

Enshrined in this investment is the belief that the real key to Canada's future prosperity is investing in making Canada a hub for cutting-edge research and innovation. We are currently ranked number one in the G7 for our support for scientific research and development in our colleges, universities, and other research institutes. However, why stop here?

By supporting innovation in our post-secondary institutions and centres of higher learning, we commit towards continuing to foster

the sharpest minds when it comes to driving Canadian-made ideas, research, and technologies.

This generation will receive the support it needs to thrive, starting with this budget's commitment to the following: expansive support advanced research infrastructure at universities and colleges through new funding to the Canada Foundation for Innovation; and landmark investment in post-secondary education through the creation of the Canada first research excellence fund, with \$1.5 billion over the next decade.

These initiatives would combine to create results for all Canadians. By remaining committed to the principles upon which we were elected, we have created 1.2 million net new jobs since the depths of the downturn and have delivered the lowest overall federal tax burden in over 50 years.

Supporting hard-working Canadian families, supporting small business, and consistently daring to innovate and grow our economy in ways that make Canada a world leader represent the road map for this accomplishment, but leadership is what has made this possible.

What separates a simple plan or design from true leadership is the willingness or the wherewithal to innovate and excel above the status quo.

• (1045)

By putting forward a budget like the economic action plan, we are allowing every Canadian to do what they do best. We are continuing to uphold our commitment to make this great nation the best that it can be in 2015 and the years to come.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the problem with this budget is that it is the latest in a long line of budgets. Since Paul Martin, the former Liberal finance minister—I apologize for naming him—in the past 20 years, we have seen a neo-liberal philosophy whose sole policy is to bring in massive tax cuts for the richest in the hope that they will one day invest, that they will one day drive the Canadian economy. After 20 years of that approach, after the former finance minister, in the final months of his life, pleaded with the wealthiest to stop accumulating wealth and do others a good turn for a change—which they still have not done—it might be time for us to ask ourselves whether it really is a good idea to keep cutting taxes for the rich and sending the bill to the rest of Canadians given the meagre outcomes in terms of investment.

The Budget

• (1050)

[English]

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Speaker, that pretty much sums up the difference between the NDP and the Conservative Party. We believe that hard-working families deserve dollars back in their pockets for them to decide how they should spend that money.

While there were structural deficits that were happening under the Martin government and the Liberals went a long way to correct that, unfortunately it was done at the expense of education and health care in this country.

One of the things that we wanted to do, and we realize it is a fine line, is how do we create incentives for job creators? How do we create a climate for people to invest in this country? What the NDP sometimes fails to understand is that capital flows around the globe all the time and can be invested wherever people and companies want to invest. Companies are going to invest wherever they think there is the best prospects and where there is the greatest opportunity, where the culture or the climate is best for companies.

We firmly believe that more money should go back to families; there is no question about that. We will never apologize for that, because we think that is very important. We will continue to create a climate that fosters job growth, innovation and creativity in this great country.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, budgets are all about priorities. For example, 18 firefighters and seven police officers, on average, die every year in the line of service. There is a public safety officer compensation fund. The annual cost to provide that subsidy to the families of those 25 first responders who die on average every year would be about \$7 million. That is actually half the amount that the government is going to be spending on advertising to promote its budget alone.

Would the member not agree that budgets are about priorities? When we think about the millions of tax dollars that are being used to promote this budget, would the money not be better spent by doing what the leader of the Liberal Party indicated yesterday, and supporting the public safety officer compensation fund by giving it \$300,000 for those who die in the line of service?

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Speaker, certainly I know that not only the member's party but all parties in the House support the great work that our first responders do. They play an important part in the economy. They play an important part in society.

I would point out that it was our government that actually introduced the tax credit for volunteer firefighters in previous budgets. While I understand that is very important, we also understand that families are under unbelievable pressure. That is why we have made sure that not one family will be left behind. Every family will have a chance to participate. That is why we have gone out of our way to make sure that families have resources and tools. That is why we have looked at tax credits for families.

It is important when it comes to the arts and to sports. My mom and dad had me involved in sports. They also had me, unfortunately, in piano lessons. My mother wanted to make sure that I was involved in the arts and my father wanted to make sure that I was involved in

sports. This provides a great balance for all families to take advantage of what we have to offer as a government.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was approximately one week ago that the finance minister stood in this House and delivered economic action plan 2015. We have all had approximately one week to reflect on what is in the plan. I have read the document in greater detail, and I am coming to realize how accurately this budget reflects a lot of the things that were said to me during our round table, my budget consultation process, in many areas. I am very pleased to be speaking to this budget and reflecting on what it means to the residents of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo. I will speak briefly about a couple of broad themes, but really I want to get into talking about individual families and constituents and what it would mean to them.

I was here in the House as we headed into the global economic recession. I remember the minister of finance of the day saying that we would have stimulus spending that would be temporary in nature and that we would get back to a balanced budget as we did not want to leave a debt for our children. This budget is really a promise made and a promise kept.

Another broad subject is supporting jobs and growth. There is a whole host of measures, again in the riding of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, that I heard directly about in terms of what is important to support. There is the mining exploration tax credit, the fund around innovation for our forestry sector, the response for technology, responsible resource development, and in particular, LNG, although it is predominantly the accelerated capital cost allowance for the LNG industry to really take hold in British Columbia and will provide enormous benefits. It is not as direct as it is much more north, but we see that there will be tremendous opportunities through that for us.

Obviously, ensuring the safety of Canadians is the government's most solemn responsibility. There are significant and important measures in place for that.

Helping families and communities prosper is where I really want to focus some important comments. I will do this by providing examples. I think the New Democrats need to hear that this is not about supporting families that are rich, that this is about supporting everyday Canadians who work hard and try to move ahead in their lives.

The Budget

My first example is a young adult whose name is Ali. She graduated from university two and a half years ago. From when she was very young she had always been told by her father to put away 10% of anything she earned, whether it was babysitting money, money from her first job after graduation, or money from her first career opportunity. She is 25 years old now and her tax-free savings account is sitting at \$10,000. This is an enormous achievement, because she paid herself first and then looked at the things that she wanted next. This year her employer offered her a bonus for work accomplished and she was able to move ahead of what she had planned for her contribution. That extra bonus will be moved right into her TFSA and it will be tax free. All of us recognize that right now it is very hard for our savings to move forward because of the interest rates. We all talk about how Canadians need to save more, but we also look at the interest rates and how hard it is to have our savings grow. When the government takes a portion of that every time, it makes it that much more difficult. This is one person. This is not a person who is rich, but while she does not make an awful lot of money, she will exceed the \$5,000 limit this year because she has savings from paying herself first.

My next example is again from my riding. Peter is in his 40s and is married. They have three children who are all above the age of five. In this case, the mother is working full time to support the family and the father has chosen to home-school his children. They live in a rural area. The father is home-schooling, and he has a small agricultural business on the side.

● (1055)

We can imagine that if a family has predominantly one income and three busy children, it is a little tough to make ends meet. In their particular case, the expansion to the universal child care benefit to now include their three children between the ages of five and eighteen is going to make an enormous difference. The family tax cut is also going to make an enormous difference, with his wife working and him making not as much income. In their case, the changes to the child expense are not going to make a difference. What is happening is that their tax money is not going to pay for services that they are not going to have, such as a bureaucratic program that very few people have access to. Again, it speaks to leaving the money in the pockets of Canadians.

In this particular case, there is something else that is important to recognize. People frequently ask who can afford \$10,000, and that only the rich can afford \$10,000. In this case, they were given a small inheritance. Some money was given to them. They have not really been able to save for the future, given their circumstances, so they have chosen to have a tax-free savings account. Although they maybe could not put in \$10,000 every year, they could take that \$40,000 that is coming to them and put it in between the space that they have. It will be an enormous benefit. Again, this is not a family that is rich. This is a family that is very prudent and is working very hard.

My final example is with respect to seniors, a couple in their late 70s. They owned a small business. They partnered in a small business all of their lives. There was no pension plan for them. They have the old age security and they have the money they put aside during their working years in order to give them a retirement that they were comfortable with. They had a huge challenge during the

time of the recession, because they had to make fairly high mandatory withdrawals from their RRIFs. That provided a real challenge for them in terms of how they were going to support themselves in the future. Again, for them, there are the changes to the RRIF. Many people came into my office to talk about how they would really appreciate some increased flexibility in their registered retirement income funds. I am really pleased to see that.

There is another item that is of enormous benefit. One of the spouses is beginning to have some significant mobility issues. They have had to adapt their washroom facilities. The home accessibility tax credit is something that is significant.

First of all, what we see in these three examples are everyday Canadians who are working hard and saving money, and who are going to see an enormous benefit from the changes that we have made in our policy, by keeping taxes low and keeping money in their pockets. In the end, it might actually save our system some additional money in terms of how we are supporting Canadians in their homes.

Another important element of this budget that speaks to hearts and something that I see in my constituency is the compassionate care benefit. There is the ability for family members to take time to be with their loved ones, not for six weeks, but for six months.

I could take a lot more time to talk about this particular budget and the elements that I believe are going to be particularly effective in supporting the riding of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo. Mostly, this budget is a budget that would be good for communities and would be good for people. They are not rich financially, but they are rich in being able to live in the greatest country in the world, and rich in terms of their life and opportunities.

I am very pleased to see this budget, and I look forward to all parties supporting it.

● (1100)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to ask my colleague a question.

She provided some examples of typical families that might benefit from her budget. I would like her to comment further on the higher tax-free savings account limit. That limit is now \$5,000, and the government would like to double it. Many experts, tax experts and economists have said that this will benefit only the wealthiest.

I would like her to tell us about a typical family in her riding that will benefit from that additional \$5,000. What typical middle-class family has enough money to benefit from being allowed to put an additional \$5,000 in a tax-free savings account?

The Budget

• (1105)

[English]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, we know that the majority of people who have money in the tax-free savings account, apparently 60% of them who have middle and lower incomes, are contributing the full amount. I gave two very important examples. Perhaps there are a number of years where a middle-class family cannot contribute but has space and receives a small inheritance. That is one example where it is an enormous benefit. Maybe in one year the family would contribute \$40,000.

I also gave another example of a middle-income single person who has made a commitment to save 10%. Making \$50,000 a year and receiving a small raise, that individual would have more flexibility. Again, this is important for Canadians to do. We talk frequently about concerns regarding Canadians saving enough and this is an enormous benefit in terms of people being able to take advantage of saving their hard-earned money.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this morning I attended a big thinking conference that the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences put on for many of us on Parliament Hill. It was with great sadness that what the professor produced for all of us in attendance was that prior to Conservatives taking power in 2006, when it came to the 15 OECD countries, Canada placed third. Today, Canada is 14th out of 15 countries when it comes to providing the various services, and so on, that Canadians need. Therefore, Canada has fallen to the bottom rather than being the example.

I would like to hear my hon. colleague's comments on the fact that Canada is 14th out of 15 now.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I think it was just last week that a study came out with regard to Canada being one of the best places to live in this world. Due to many measures in the last 30 years, in spite of what the opposition says, which is inaccurate, middle-income earners have enormous opportunities. We have enormous mobility within our country for someone who struggles. Another example would be the 32 weeks that are now available for students to access programs. A single mother might be willing to make a commitment to a 32-week course and become a dental assistant.

Really, Canada measures very well in terms of mobility, the middle class and being one of the best places in the world to live.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Trinity—Spadina.

Mr. Speaker, I am glad to be able to speak to “budget 2017”, as I call it, because it will be 2017, frankly, before much of this budget ever gets enacted. That, again, will depend very much upon what happens in the the upcoming election.

As the representative of the people of York West, I am on my feet to express my disappointment and the feelings of betrayal felt by the people and the communities, certainly, in my riding. They have been very vocal in their concerns for many of the things lacking in this budget that they were hopeful would be there.

Budget 2015-17 is not about what we have accomplished. Sadly, this budget is about what the current government has yet to attack,

including the security of our grandchildren. If members want an example, during the budget speech, the Minister of Finance smugly declared “the winds of prosperity again fill our sails”. This is perhaps one of the most shameful and out-of-touch statements to cross the lips of a federal finance minister to show that, clearly, the Conservative government is out of touch.

First, when a government pretends to balance its books by selling off public assets and swallowing the rainy day reserves, just to look good because we have an election coming, it is both disappointing and dangerous for the future of our country. However, the current government did exactly that, and worse.

After being handed a massive \$14-billion Liberal surplus, just nine short years ago, we have to say, look at what has happened. The Conservatives have mismanaged Canada's finances into a deep hole and budget 2015 proves they have no plan to stop digging themselves into that hole.

Budget 2015 contains nothing that would make a real difference for the families, students and seniors living in my riding because it ignores key items like job creation. This budget ignores the pleas of students at York University, Humber and Seneca. It does nothing to expand the vital community programming offered by groups like Elspeth Heyworth Centre, Ephraim's Place, Youth Now On Track, and so on, and it ignores the struggles faced by those living in places like 35 Shoreham and 7/11 Arleta.

These are good people who work hard and deserve better. They deserve a hand up from their government, but they have been ignored by the current Prime Minister.

Yet, again, the minister is proving that Conservatives are more concerned about prosperity around boardroom tables than the kitchen tables. To me, and to those I am here to serve, it seems clear that this budget would be about giving more to those who already have so much, rather than helping those who need it most.

Even the Conservative backbench knows that the current government has dropped the ball when it comes to real fiscal management. The Conservative backbench is appalled by the minister's shocking admission that he and the Prime Minister are sticking our grandchildren with a huge bill in an effort to hide the growing holes in the Conservative fiscal strategy.

I listened to the budget speech and I have read the minister's comments carefully. I am astounded that he would pretend that “the winds of prosperity again fill our sails”. Clearly, the minister has never worked a shift at West Finch Bakery or at Globe Meats. He has clearly never slept the night at 15 Tobermory or 3001 Finch. Had he done any of these things, he would understand what it is like to worry about the next rent payment, the grocery bills or a medical bill.

The Budget

Perhaps the minister was referring to his banker friends on Bay Street, who are the top 10% of income earners, because he certainly was not talking about the single parents, the blue-collar labourers, the low-income seniors, the struggling students or the unemployed workers along the Jane-Finch corridor. Yet, this kind of prosperity quest is part of a very long tradition that we have seen from the current government. Community groups and service organizations in my riding, and in ridings across the country, have been staring down draconian cuts in the face of the government since it came to power.

No, the lasting and deep social damage caused by the current government's short-sighted, top-down philosophy started long before budget 2015.

The members of North Islington Seniors and the Giovanni Caboti silver age club remember too well when the Prime Minister announced to the world that he would be rolling back old age security benefits for low-income seniors. He said it was necessary because they needed to tighten their belts.

• (1110)

After that, the Conservatives lined up to vote against a Liberal motion to end a special \$90,000 annual prime ministerial pension. I guess the Prime Minister is all about belt-tightening, as long as it is not his belt.

This was similar to the shock felt by the Northwood Community Centre seniors when the Prime Minister specifically violated his election promise, just another one, not to tax income trusts, again thrusting seniors under the Conservative cost-slashing knife because he thought it was necessary. Seniors know just how the Prime Minister is funding the so-called prosperity agenda that the Minister of Finance is crowing about.

However, seniors are not the only ones under threat. Certainly, the Conservatives would not dare deny their attack on new Canadians when they decimated settlement agencies in 2011, just as a reminder. The 10% cutback in funding was quietly announced just days before Christmas. Most of the cuts fell in Ontario, where at least 10 Toronto based agencies had their funding cut by 100%, while 35 other Ontario agencies had their budgets drastically reduced. I would gladly give the Prime Minister the telephone number for the Elspeth Heyworth Centre if he had the courage to chat with the administrator there about how the Conservative prosperity agenda has touched people in areas like mine.

The reality of budget 2015 is that it is the most recent hack in a series of Conservative cuts working to dismantle and destroy the vital social programs built over generations and manned by hundreds and hundreds of volunteers across Canada. Since winning power nine years ago, the Conservatives have chipped away at programs that helped define the compassionate, caring Canada built by our grandparents. We all know, thanks to the Minister of Finance, what the Conservatives plan to hand to our grandchildren.

On the ground and in my riding, groups like Black Creek Community Health Centre, Northwood, Doorsteps, Youth Now On Track, Jane Finch Community Legal Services, the Elspeth, and the Jane Finch Community and Family Centre have all faced so-called prosperity cuts at the hands of the government.

These groups and agencies are not alone. Multiple aboriginal organizations, environmental groups, including the Experimental Lakes Area research site and the Hazardous Material Information Review Commission, have all been hit. Anyone working to advance the causes not in the Prime Minister's good graces has faced and will face the knife. Groups working on child care, rights advocates, health care researchers, numerous immigration support organizations and women's groups, including the National Association of Women and the Law, as well as the National Network on Environments and Women's Health received less support from Ottawa than they did under the previous Liberal government, a government that offered support while delivering tax cuts and the largest surplus in our history. It is too bad the Conservatives did not ask for some advice. I am sure we could have helped them.

The truth of the budget is the same as every Conservative budget delivered under the mean-spirited and paternalistic eye of the Prime Minister. The budget offered a \$2-billion tax break for the wealthiest 13%, while slashing support to the 87% of Canadians who will never see a dime of that money. The budget fails to offer even a glimpse of a plan for job growth and ignores the fact that unemployment is now higher than before the recession began.

The minister feels that the winds of prosperity again fill our sails, but those living in my riding, and countless ridings across the country, are unfortunately tied to an anchor that Stephen Harper has produced for them.

Clearly, I have touched—

• (1115)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The member is a veteran. She knows she cannot use given names of other members, including the Prime Minister, in the chamber.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have completed my comments.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a bit strange to listen to the speech of my distinguished Liberal colleague because she is criticizing a budget that could be a carbon copy of a Liberal budget.

Under the Liberal watch, Paul Martin made unthinkable cuts to public services, particularly to the health care system and social assistance. The zero deficit was achieved at the expense of the provinces and public services. The Conservatives are seeking to achieve a balanced budget at the expense of future generations. Our grandchildren will have to foot that bill because we are off-loading our problems onto them.

The problem is that my colleague is criticizing the Conservatives' Bay Street and oil company friends when she is a member of the Liberal Party. Perhaps she needs to be reminded that Bay Street is on her side, not on Canadians' side.

We would like to hear the Liberal Party's position on Canada Post, the CBC and foreign trusts, for example, rather than hear my colleague claim that she is different from the Conservatives when she is exactly the same.

The Budget

[English]

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, clearly some of the history has already been forgotten. When the Liberals came into power in 1993, there was over a \$42 billion deficit. Canada was facing bankruptcy.

The cuts that had to be made were made, and the reinvestments were also made in the years that followed, to the point that the Liberal government was able to leave a \$13 billion surplus for the current government, which it squandered away in its first three years and then started running a deficit.

In order to have a so-called balanced budget today, the Conservatives had to raid the contingency fund and anything else they possibly could to claim they had balanced the budget, finally, after nine years.

• (1120)

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I keep hearing questions from a party that talks about coalition, but every time we speak, its members get mad at us for having an opinion. It is a strange way to make a coalition work.

I, too, lived through the nineties with the Liberal government and worked at a Crown corporation at the time. I was also aware of the cuts. However, I also saw that as the budget was balanced, repayment and rebuilding social programs were well under way.

There were two programs in particular. The first was daycare, a new national agreement, which would have delivered real daycare spaces across the country, was finally achieved with consent and co-operation from the provinces, in which provincial jurisdiction is important to acknowledge. The second was in housing which, in the last budget presented in the House by a Liberal Party, had \$2.7 billion for public housing. When that government fell, the \$2.7 billion, which would have been spent this year, disappeared with it.

Are those the programs that are part of the thinking that criticizes the budget, the absence of daycare and a housing program? Is that why the member is so concerned that the budget fails to meet the needs of Canadians?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, many of the single moms I meet every day in my riding all want to go to work or they want to return to school. They cannot do either one of those things because they cannot get child care. There are long lists to get into subsidized child care. If we truly want to give people a hand up and give them the opportunity to work, we have to provide opportunities for child care.

I do not believe anybody wants to sit at home collecting welfare. I think people want to work, but there are two fundamentals: one is housing and the other is child care. Those basic things need to be provided to ensure that women can get out to work today so they can fulfill their dreams just as everybody else has wanted to do for such a long time.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to highlight three areas of significant concern with this budget as they relate to both the city I live in and also the portfolios I hold as the Liberal critic for housing and urban affairs.

This budget really should be called the 2017 budget, because none of the money for cities really arrives for two years. The promises are made now, but the obligations and opportunities are off into the

future. I can assure the House that the government in 2017 will be addressing those issues, but it will be addressing them in real time, not in some deferred payment scheme that, quite frankly, does not work for cities that have needs now and the people who live in those cities have needs now.

The first issue and the one dearest to my heart is housing. There is one provision in this budget that deals with housing. The government's position has been to penalize co-ops and affordable housing projects that are suffering from extraordinarily high interest rates. If those projects sought to refinance, the Conservative government would penalize them at a profit for the treasury, but at a huge detriment—in obligation to the housing providers.

The government has now surrendered its punitive penalty program and in doing so may free up dollars that can deal with some state of good repair issues, which are enormous in our country. This is because there is no program on state of good repair budgets that even comes close to dealing with the deficiencies that exist, not just in aboriginal housing but almost all public housing stock in our country. It is a public asset that has been neglected, part of the infrastructure deficit that is not addressed by the government and a real hardship for people living in substandard housing. However, when the Conservatives put that policy on the table and we asked CMHC or even yesterday when I asked a member of the government to detail how it would work, they had no idea how it would work.

For example, when surrendering CMHC mortgages, quite often the subsidy agreements are tied to those mortgages. Therefore, would we be surrendering the subsidy as well? The agreements that expire see the mortgage expire and the subsidy agreement expire. The government is saying not to use that money to recapitalize or repair housing, rather use it to sustain subsidy so one neighbour subsidizes another, which is a crazy way of providing public housing, but it is the ideological position adopted by the government.

When we ask that question, we can not get an answer because nobody at treasury, nobody at CMHC and nobody in the House knows the answer. However, it is a fundamentally important question, because if the money that is supposed to flow to public housing suddenly disqualifies the subsidies that make it affordable, it is no longer affordable housing and will actually cost housing providers more money than they will be earning under this surrendered penalty policy. We need an answer on that.

The Budget

We also have no idea how one would qualify or apply, because no program has been enunciated beyond the promise in the budget, and this is important. The city of Toronto's public housing provider, Toronto Community Housing, could use all of that \$140 million in one year, which means no other providers across the country would get relief from it. If it is not available to Toronto Community Housing, then it suddenly does not have the money to repair its housing stock. Therefore, how it is handed out, who gets to apply, whether it is done on a regional basis or project-by-project basis, what the size of the penalty is, or how close one is to the end of one's mortgage, are all details for which answers do not exist. That is why this budget, which is so unfair to individuals, is also useless to civil society when it tries to actually use it.

This is not a budget, but rather a series of ethereal promises that will be worked out in time. In other words, even though the Conservatives took extra time to write this budget, they now need extra time to tell us what it actually means. Therefore, those promises are empty on housing.

However, the real issue is that the Conservatives continue to brag about the status quo, and the status quo in our country is terrible. There is not a city that does not have a waiting list for public housing. Yet, when we look at the waiting list, 92,000 households in Toronto and close to 200,000 people, the money given under the existing agreements that the Conservatives are bragging about deliver 60 units of housing per year over the next five years. That means the city of Toronto technically has a 1,500 year wait list, and the Conservatives pat themselves on the back for having approached this with \$140 million in mortgage relief penalty funds. It does not work. That money does not build new housing. We need new housing. There is no national program, and we need one now.

● (1125)

There are two issues, and one of them is transit. The FCM has thanked the government because in two years \$250 million will start to flow for transit projects. Even then, there is a catch. The money has to be borrowed through a private sector fund and the money is spent out over 30 years. Then, they are going to be chosen on merit. No one can define what merit means. The last time merit meant something, the government went to a guy called Rob Ford and got advice on how to spend money on transit. If that is the kind of merit process we are about to walk into, God help us.

The real issue is that the money is needed now on this file. The biggest problem the major cities, like Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, have is not new projects, it is the state of good repair of existing transit infrastructure. That money, that capital dollars, those flows could start immediately and start helping to repair and support cities that are trying to provide transit, despite the fact the government has no real policy except when it comes to the opportunity to cut a ribbon and put a billboard up.

The transit policy has to move far beyond new projects. It has to include state of good repair. Yet, on this file, the money is not there for two years, and the commitment to state of good repair does not exist at all. When we look at the actual dollar amounts, it is too little for the big cities and it actually becomes too big for the smaller cities because they do not have the fiscal capacity to partner with the

federal government let alone the private sector to deliver many of these programs.

The fear is that this will only work in a few suburban communities, and it will not provide us with a national transit strategy that is effective.

The final issue is water, the most pressing concern for the folks in city halls and town halls right across the country. They are dealing with two very different dynamics. One of them is climate change, and we can see the impact of climate change and not preparing for it. We can see the impact of that in Calgary with the floods and the hundreds of millions, close to billions, of dollars that could cost that city hall because it did not have the money to protect itself with the infrastructure.

There is no money for climate change, no money for adaptation, no money for cities to deal with these flash storms that are occurring and creating havoc in cities right across the country, large and small.

Without the ability to manage the next century, it will be hellish for municipalities because they do not have the capacity to deal with storms of the century, which now occur every two and three years. This is a significant issue. No money has been set aside in this budget, anywhere, for new infrastructure to deal with that issue.

The Conservatives talk about the building Canada fund, but there were zero dollars last year to almost every city in the country. Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal received zero dollars, all matched by Winnipeg, Regina, Calgary, Halifax and Quebec City that received zero dollars. The reason was because the budget that introduced it also had no program and no detail attached to it. It took the government almost eight months to even set up a desk to take inquiries let alone applications.

Once again, because the government delayed the budget, it has missed another building year, another construction cycle, and it will be two years before people can even apply for that money and get real dollars into their budget. The real crux of the matter is that money does not arrive for 10 years.

Therefore, there is no money for climate change adaptation in this budget to arrive at city halls to get to work now to help cities immediately.

The final piece of the water puzzle is clean water for drinking. On this file, the federal government has loaded requirements onto small cities in particular and has not provided one penny in predictable, stable funding in a way that those small cities can actually build the water plants they need to meet new federal regulations and also to replace aging infrastructure.

The Budget

In places like the regional municipality of Cape Breton and Sydney, where there is a \$625 million water bill on the horizon, the infrastructure dollars are so insignificant that people in that part of the country are wondering if they have to shut down their entire governmental operations, which is ironically \$625 million a year on a regional budget basis. They are wondering if they have to shut the whole thing down just to pay for the new federal regulations. Then they are wondering if they are going to get any help from Ottawa.

Small town by small town, rural town by rural town, northern town by northern town, these new obligations are so magnificent that the federal government has driven into city hall and town hall budgets. We have to wonder why the government did not respond with an infrastructure program that dealt with this specific set of requirements.

Instead, what we get is silence. The only help that seems to materialize is 10 years from now. We cannot wait 10 years for clean water. We need it now.

On housing, water and transit, this is not a 2015 budget, it is a 2017 budget at best. Even then the dollar amounts are so low, it is a useless budget and it is an unfair budget, particularly for people living in urban areas.

• (1130)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to be able to ask my colleague a question. We share some of the same questions and concerns.

More specifically, I want to ask him about the tax rate for small and medium-sized businesses. I am still not clear about where he stands on this issue. When the budget was presented, the leader of his party did not take a clear stand on this issue. He said one thing but then changed his position. I would therefore like the member to clarify his party's position regarding lowering the tax rate from 11% to 9% for small and medium-sized businesses in Canada.

Many local businesses in my riding, whether it be my dry cleaner or the convenience store around the corner from my house, are happy that we proposed this measure and that the Conservatives took it from our platform.

I would therefore like to know what my colleague thinks about lowering the tax rate from 11% to 9% to help small and medium-sized businesses across Canada.

[English]

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, our leader was very clear, so let me help the member understand it in more detail.

We support the cut for small businesses, but we think the implementation requires more detail. There are different types of small businesses. People can self-incorporate as individuals. They can have a law degree and hire themselves out as a consultant and make a six-figure salary, doing wonderfully well, but only employ themselves and effectively self-incorporate as a model to manage their tax load as opposed to actually starting and running a small business.

Then there are small businesses, of which my riding has many, that employ people: a corner store, a small start-up firm in a high-

tech field, or a new law firm. There are small businesses that have employees. We think that the tax cuts need to bonus those businesses that hire people; so we should target the small-business cut to employment growth, not simply to tax avoidance.

A blanket statement of whether a cut for small-business taxes is good or bad is too easy to make. The question is how to make cuts to small-business tax to generate jobs for people and grow the strength of a community. That is the distinction that the leader of the Liberal Party was making when he said he was concerned about the tax cut as just a tax cut in and of itself.

• (1135)

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague for his remarks. I want to go back to the theme he raised with respect to climate and what has been increasingly described as the need for resiliency as we adjust and adapt to the new normals around the effects of climate change.

The member alluded to water. California is now drilling 600 metres below the surface to try to find water for agricultural and irrigation purposes. The not-so-deep aquifers have been depleted to such an extent that the California land mass has actually fallen, which is why California is building, for example, massive desalination plants on the coast.

There is nothing in this budget that addresses the need for innovation. There is nothing that addresses the need for new-tech, clean-tech start-ups. There is no recognition of the need to prepare ourselves to be resilient and adapt to climate.

I wonder if the member could expand on those concerns and particularly talk not just about the concerns or the magnitude of the challenge in front of us, but let us talk, as we like to talk in the Liberal Party, about the magnitude of the economic and job opportunities for us to create wealth and do well inside and outside of Canada. He could start, for example, to talk about water and water technology.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, the way in which urban areas manage water is going to be one of the defining issues of the next century. In downtown Toronto, I have a great set of examples as to why it is so critical. Our drinking water comes from the lake and our lake is fed by the rivers. The rivers that flow through Toronto are heavily polluted and as they enter the lake they pollute our drinking water. Cleaning up the Don River, as an example, is fundamental to protecting the source of our drinking water in a city like Toronto, but also for the region of the GTA.

The Budget

We have a project that is on the books that requires a federal commitment of about \$325 million. It is a \$1 billion project to build flood protection for the lower Don lands but also a filtration system to clean the water before it gets to Lake Ontario. We had heard that money was going to be in this year's budget, but it is not. When we do not invest, we send pollution into the lake that makes it difficult to clean for drinking water, but we also have not unlocked billions of dollars in real estate opportunities in downtown Toronto.

We end up with the worst of all worlds: we do not make an investment that protects the water; we do not make an investment that produces an economy; and we do not make an investment that protects the city from being flooded. Instead, we expose the city to risk on all three fronts.

Hon. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and for International Human Rights, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to stand in the House and speak once more on a budget. As a matter of fact, this is my 18th budget speech I am making today, and 11 of them were on Conservative budgets.

Before I talk about the budget, I want to pause and reflect on the terrible tragedy that has befallen Nepal due to an earthquake.

In January, I went to Nepal to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Canada-Nepal relations. Our relationship has been a long and good one, and it was a successful visit. I saw the development challenges Nepal was facing due to the long Maoist rebellion. It was looking forward to moving on; then this tragedy struck. Nepal is poor, and the Nepali are poor and struggling to provide for themselves and their families.

The government has responded in a variety of ways. I today want to make an appeal to Canadians to give to organizations that are in the forefront of assistance. The government will match contributions. Please help the people of Nepal in their time of need.

Turning to the budget, I will be sharing my time with the member for Mississauga East—Cooksville.

It would come as a big surprise to have the NDP and the Liberals actually supporting the budget. As in the past, this year they have indicated without looking at the budget that they will not be supporting it, and then they went on to find reasons why they do not want to support it.

I come from Calgary, Alberta, an oil-producing province. No one here is talking about the dramatic collapse of oil prices, as if the price of oil falling would have no impact at all on the budget or on the economy, not recognizing the fact that all of Canada benefits from the oil industry, including from eastern Canada. Everybody is saying we want money, we want money, and the government has not done this, and that it went into the contingency fund to balance the budget. What are we talking about? There has been a massive shortfall in revenue.

My own family works in the oil industry. My daughter, my son, and my son-in-law are facing an uncertain future today. Massive layoffs are taking place. This is impacting the whole of Canada, yet this is the time to provide sound economic management of the economy and that is what the budget would do.

The budget has focused on growth, on jobs, and on security. In October last year, we were attacked in Parliament. These are the concerns of Canadians. When I went doorknocking last weekend for my colleagues in the Conservative Party in Alberta, this is what I heard from people. Yet, here we have the NDP and the Liberal Party talking about no investment here, no investment there. It is time they took a pause and said it is time to provide sound management.

When the price of oil goes back up and the economy moves forward, then there will be choices to be made where we can invest, but currently, what Canadians want is security of their jobs. That is what we are facing. That is what the budget is talking about. That is why the budget is a forward-looking budget.

It is amazing that the Liberal MP said this budget will hit in 2017. The price of oil is low today and revenues are compromised and even then we managed, without raising taxes, to bring in a balanced budget. What is the contingency fund for? This is a rainy day. Opposition members do not know what a rainy day is, as the Liberal member talked about. When the price of oil was \$100 a barrel and today it is close to \$50, is that not a rainy day? When is a rainy day then?

• (1140)

Nevertheless, this government has made sound decisions on where it will invest and which ones it will invest in, so that there is confidence that the Canadian economy is moving.

I am the parliamentary secretary. When I go overseas and when I meet people, all of them have questions to ask me. How did we manage to escape the 2008 recession? Are our banks not failing? How is Canada providing such strong, economic stability while other countries are facing different challenges?

Who are we? We are an oil producing country. We are not an oil consuming country that is benefiting from low prices.

At the end of the day, I want to say to my colleagues that at this given time when there are challenges out there of low oil prices, it is time to make sound judgement. The NDP opposed the pipeline that would help export our oil. That would benefit the whole country, but no. The NDP nitpicks here and there.

For the Liberals, let me say this. As I have said, this is my 18th budget. Of them, 11 were Conservative and 7 were Liberal. Members should have seen the rhetoric that was coming from the Liberal Party. Today, the last Liberal speaker to stand up was insulting the Minister of Finance. That is all the Liberals love to do. They love to insult people. They do not come up with any good ideas. All they do is insult. What a shame. I have sat in this Parliament. Canadians do not like other people insulting them. If they want to talk, they should talk about exactly what it is that they are standing up for.

That is why there is confusion now. The question was asked by the NDP to the Liberals: what do they stand for? There is total confusion out there.

The Budget

I was here in Parliament when the Liberals presented their budgets, and did they come up with anything? Now they are blaming the Conservatives for doing anything, specifically when there was the 2008 global recession. We went through that, with banks failing. No Canadian bank failed. Where do they think that came from, the Liberals? It absolutely did not.

Now, with low oil prices, we are still doing okay. The country is still managing well because of sound management. Do they think it came from the Liberals? It absolutely did not.

The NDP, of course, wants high taxes. That would be their government. I have no idea where they would get the money that they are talking about, spending with high taxes. This is something where, these days, the Liberals and the NDP are becoming pretty difficult to distinguish between. They have different names, but they seem to be talking the same language. Maybe this is the coalition that they are trying to form for the next federal election. I can tell the House that the way in which this budget was presented and from the feedback that I got, we are on solid footing and we will remain on solid footing.

This government, under the Prime Minister, has provided excellent leadership on economics as well as on security. Let us talk for a minute about security. Canadians are concerned about security. We hear it time after time. We just heard from the security agencies that, yes, Canadians are under threat, and the jihadis have made absolutely no secret about wanting to attack Canada. Would it not be prudent for us to invest money there for our own security? Would that not be prudent?

My opponent from the Liberal Party came out and said that we should not be in Iraq, that we should be out of Iraq, until he got such a severe backlash that he had to withdraw what he wrote on his Facebook page.

Mr. Speaker, you have pointed out that I have a minute. I want to say this. This is the budget that would provide the security of jobs and national security for the people of Canada, and I am very happy to support it.

• (1145)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative member is complaining about the price of oil and the faltering economy, but the Conservatives have only themselves to blame.

They put all their eggs in one basket. They ran seven deficit budgets. They increased the national debt by \$100 billion. They subsidized big corporations and banks without requiring them to reinvest in our society. They dipped into the contingency fund and the employment insurance fund, they sold off shares and they would have us believe that they are good managers.

The only thing the Conservatives are currently doing for the future is accumulating debt for future generations.

What does the member think of the government's mismanagement?

[*English*]

Hon. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, the member is talking about my being concerned about oil prices. He should be concerned too about oil prices, because it impacts the whole country.

I am absolutely amazed and stunned, and in my speech I said so, that Canada did not need to bail out the banks during the worldwide recession, as other countries did. Therefore, I have no clue what he is talking about when he says that we subsidized the banks. As a matter of fact, we had excellent regulations that ensured that the banks would not take the risk. He should be proud of some of the things that have taken place instead of giving the NDP rhetoric, as it always does, about wanting high corporate taxes and about helping banks, which did not take place.

Let me remind him quite clearly: Canada did not bail out the banks in the worldwide recession in 2008.

• (1150)

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is perhaps the most revisionist piece of history I have heard here in 11 years.

The member may have been here for 18 budgets, but I think he was probably asleep for most of them. I want to remind Canadians about a few of the facts he alluded to.

Number one, there were 11 consecutive surplus Liberal budgets before the Conservative government came into power. Number two, it was left with a \$14-billion surplus, and it put this economy and country into recession before the 2008 great recession hit the globe. Everyone knows that. Every economist knows that. That is fact number two.

Number three is this idea that he goes around the world and hears from folks about the Canadian banking system. He is right, the Canadian banking system did withstand the American meltdown and is a model now for most of the planet, but I would like to remind him and Canadians and members in the House that his leader, as leader of the official opposition at the time, was attacking the Liberal government and then prime minister Chrétien, clamouring for Canadian banks to be owned by American banks to allow them to merge and join the ranks of the hyper-exposed global banking actors. His leader was the one who fought hardest to have the Canadian banking system exposed.

Therefore, it is very rich to hear the member put forward this revisionist history. His credibility here is on the line. He should perhaps keep to the merits of the budget he was speaking to earlier without going back and inventing things.

Hon. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, I have to give credit to the member. At least he is not doing what previous members were doing and insulting others personally.

The Budget

Let me say one thing about what he said. How did the Liberals balance the budget? They did it by cutting transfers to the provinces. The Liberal government he is talking about made massive cuts to transfers to the provinces to balance the budget, and he should feel ashamed. His government downloaded everything so that it could take credit, and it left the provinces on their own. It is this government that came into power and restored them. This government has increased transfers since 2006 so that front-line services could be provided to Canadians with the transfers his government cut by downloading to the provinces.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak in support of and to provide some input into economic action plan 2015. This is certainly a plan of action to continue the necessary actions required to keep our country in the focused direction needed and that has made us the envy of the G7.

Our government has worked hard, and continues to, and is focused on its commitment to the priorities of Canadians: jobs, economic stability, growth, and long-term prosperity. Economic action plan 2015's clear focus on jobs, growth, and security is what my constituents in the riding of Mississauga East—Cooksville and Canadians across the country are looking for.

Back in January, like many of my colleagues, I hosted pre-budget consultations with community and business representatives in my riding to hear their ideas and suggestions. Representatives from a number of key areas, including health, manufacturing, skilled trades, social services, business, and community services, were consulted. I submitted this valuable input to our Minister of Finance and am very pleased to see some of the measures that were included in this budget, economic action plan 2015.

A highly skilled and highly educated workforce is key to succeeding in the global economy. It is also important that we give an equal opportunity to everyone. I was very pleased to announce over \$238,000 in funding for the opportunities fund to support the Centre for Education & Training's project to help people with disabilities overcome barriers to employment.

During the pre-budget consultation I held, there was a gentleman by the name of Mike Di Donato, who is the dean of the Skilled Trades College of Canada, which is located in the area I represent. He joined in the discussion on the role of skilled trades and pre-apprenticeship training. We had an opportunity to talk, and he voiced his concerns about the future of skilled trades training and the upcoming federal budget. There is always work to be done in the area of skilled trades, but there are some measures in this budget that are key to the future of skilled trades. This is something Mr. Di Donato is passionate about.

Our government is taking action to harmonize the apprenticeship training and certification requirements in targeted Red Seal trades. The budget also proposes to reallocate up to \$35 million over five years for a pilot project for foreign credential recognition loans, and to make it permanent, to support internationally trained workers. This is important news for many constituents in my riding, where many new Canadians come and make their home and want to contribute their skills and expertise.

As a government, we have to do what we can to help create the conditions under which businesses thrive, create jobs, and move our economy. That means helping small businesses and entrepreneurs create jobs. I am pleased to say that our budget proposes to reduce the small business tax rate to 9% by 2019.

● (1155)

The support of our communities is important, and this is done through a number of commitments, including gas tax funding. For the city of Mississauga, that means millions of dollars every year that allows the municipality and the Region of Peel to make priority investments in transportation and infrastructure to keep people moving.

The budget also proposes several measures to help families. The underlying point of balancing the budget is that it allows us to keep the focus on lower taxes to help families and hard-working Canadians. In fact, the overall federal tax burden is now at its lowest level in more than 50 years.

Just two weeks ago, I hosted the 50+ Expo for people over 50 years of age. It was an exciting event for local people who are at the point in their lives when important matters such as retirement planning, security, and safety become a reality. I heard from a number of those who came that they want to remain independent and not have to depend on others as they move to their later years in life.

I would mention some of the measures in the budget to support seniors and people with disabilities. The budget proposes a home accessibility tax credit to help seniors and people with disabilities with renovation costs to make their homes accessible so that they can stay at home and be independent.

We are also introducing changes to the registered retirement income fund that will assist seniors and allow them to withdraw less from their tax-deferred savings. Also, we are increasing the tax-free savings account annual contribution from \$5,000 to \$10,000. This is something colleagues on the opposite side are criticizing very heavily, but this is a great measure, and I have heard wonderful comments from constituents in my riding about it.

We will always support our veterans, our heroes. Just recently I was honoured to receive a visit from one of them, a Mr. Donald Somerville, who is going with a group of veterans, leaving this weekend, to the Netherlands to celebrate the 70th anniversary of liberation.

We honour our veterans, and we have to make sure that they receive everything and anything they need, especially at the later stages of life. It is important that veterans know that they can count on support for their services. Our budget increases the level of individualized care to veterans requiring regular support by improving the ratio of veterans to case managers. We are also introducing a new retirement income security benefit for severely disabled veterans.

I also want to speak about security for all Canadians. This is very important. People across Canada are looking for safe streets and safe communities, and they want to make sure that our government provides measures and support to our security agencies that keep us safe here in this country.

The Budget

In closing, the budget is a balanced budget. This was a promise made. This is a promise kept. Therefore, I would like, in closing, to ask all my colleagues in this House to support the budget to support what Canadians are looking for.

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to ask a question of my colleague, who concluded his speech by talking about the Conservatives' promise to balance the budget, when they presented Canadians with seven budgets in a row that were not balanced.

Today, the Conservatives have a new-found passion for balanced budgets. What is more, they are set to introduce a bill to force future governments to present balanced budgets when they themselves did not do that for the past five years. It is rather surprising, not to mention hypocritical, for a government to claim to be passionate about balanced budgets when it did not balance any of its own budgets in the past five years. It did not even respect its own legislation that it is about to introduce to Canadians.

Could my colleague speak to how sincere the Conservatives' new passion really is?

[*English*]

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: Mr. Speaker, I am as surprised as my colleague who spoke before me that all that is coming from the other side is criticism without any ideas being put forward. It is very easy to criticize.

To answer the member, he should probably go back and read the history of what happened in the past. That would probably help him understand better why there was not an investment during the difficult economic times, and how well Canada did in those past years. We have done so well that we are truly the envy of other developed nations. That is what government is for, to act when there is a need to act, to work in the best interest of the country, to work in the best interest of Canadians and to act when the need arises.

We were able to balance the budget this year without raising taxes. We are cutting taxes. Taxes are at the lowest level in 50 years. I think the member should appreciate this. Canadians do appreciate it.

• (1205)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, perhaps this is a question that should more properly go to the finance minister but I have not had a chance to put a question to the finance minister yet.

We could have balanced the budget last year had the minister been willing to go into the contingency fund. The balanced budget this year is because the finance minister went into the contingency fund. I am not clear at all on the matter of fiscal planning why the contingency fund was needed this year but not last year, other than the political promises that have been made based on “once we balance the budget, we will bring in income splitting” and so on.

In other words, I think this budget is being driven by political machinations and not actual good financial planning. Perhaps the

member could explain why the contingency fund was not used last year to balance the budget.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: Mr. Speaker, as I stated when answering the first question, the government is here to do the best for the country and for Canadians. These measures that are included in this balanced budget are what Canadians were looking for. We are helping Canadians. We are helping businesses. We are helping families. We are helping those who have challenges in life. That is what is important.

This is what Canadians are looking for. They are looking for good management of the economy, and they are looking for a good future for themselves and their families.

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Victoria.

It is an honour to rise today and speak in response to the budget introduced by the government in the House last week. Over the last four years, as a member of Parliament, I have learned one thing for sure: Conservatives and the Prime Minister are not nearly the economic managers they seem to think they are. In fact, time and time again, the government chose precisely the opposite. The Conservatives have shown us, and Canadians, just how incompetent they can be as managers of the economy. The government has dropped the ball on so many incredibly important files. We just have to look at the F-35.

Conservatives must have a good supply of pixie dust to use on unsuspecting Canadians if they think they can pass this budget off as sound economic planning. Of course, this is backstopped by at least a \$13-million advertising budget, using Canadians' money, which they are going to spend on propelling themselves into the election.

I had to laugh last week when my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley said this in his response to the budget:

They spent the surplus before they had it. Then they panicked.... They didn't know what to do because the economy was not performing the way they had hoped. One would think that planning more than praying would be [the norm] within the finance department, but not under [this government].

My esteemed colleague could not have been more correct.

How else do we explain a budget that is predicated on such a shallow set of priorities and planning principles, with so little regard for thinking things through? How else could one explain draining the contingency fund so that in the short term it looks like we are not in a deficit? Of course, dropping that from \$3 billion to \$1 billion means that any unforeseen event that could take place would actually bring the government back into the red. We just have to look at last year to some of the events that happened. We had the ice storm in Toronto. We had tremendous flooding in Alberta and in Toronto. There were also other weather events that cost the economy, and certainly cost the provinces and the federal government, billions of dollars. The contingency fund is there for good reason, to protect against unforeseen events.

The Budget

We also saw the fire sale of our government's interest in General Motors. We all understand that the government was not supposed to hold on to these shares in perpetuity. However, one of the simple staples of investing in stocks is to buy low and sell high. What the government has done in selling the shares at this time is actually costing \$3.5 billion. It sold the shares at a net loss of \$3.5 billion. It is as if every single Canadian across the country had a \$100 bill to begin with, took it out of their pocket and set it on fire. That is \$100 for every Canadian that the government has wasted in order to say it has a balanced budget.

These things are very questionable, and not just in my opinion, but in the opinion of many economists on both sides of the political spectrum.

Much more importantly, I want to talk about the changes the government is making to tax-free savings accounts. These changes really represent just how cynical and crass the government can be and how shallow and short-sighted its economic policy really is. The Conservatives are going to change the maximum allowable contributions for TFSAs to up to \$10,000 a year. Who does this help? We have heard from the government that millions of Canadians have TFSAs.

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Eleven million.

Mr. Dan Harris: Yes, Mr. Speaker, 11 million. However, only 11% of those people deposited the maximum last year. Therefore, 90% of the people depositing already do not have enough to deposit the current maximum, but the government wants to double it. Why is that? It is because it will help the Conservatives' well-heeled friends. It is not going to help the majority of the working-class and middle-class people I work for in my riding of Scarborough Southwest. These people do not seem to find themselves burdened at the end of the year with having to decide what to do with an extra \$10,000 that is burning a hole in their pockets. I wish I could say that they did because Scarborough used to be a prosperous place. It used to have above national average incomes. It used to have tens of thousands of good-paying manufacturing jobs that helped to elevate people into the middle class. However, through successive Liberal and Conservative governments, since first free trade and then NAFTA came in, all of that industry and all of those good-paying jobs left.

• (1210)

We used to have a GM van plant in my riding. It has been gone since the early 1990s. We used to have tens of thousands of good jobs along what was called the golden mile, which, when it opened after the Second World War, was the model on which many communities ended up being built because people could live and work close together and also have good-paying jobs. They are all gone, and they have been replaced by part-time, precarious, largely retail jobs and car malls that are not very accessible by transit, that do not make good planning for those areas. Who are these changes being made for? I have said, it is for the wealthy few.

That is just like the income-splitting plan, a \$2.5-billion waste of our money that could be far better spent, either on actually balancing the budget so they do not have to dip into the contingency fund or on other programs like affordable child care.

The current government's entire package and plan for families would give families up to \$1,960 a year per child. In the city of Toronto, child care costs are between \$1,000 and \$2,000 a month per child. Exactly what are the Conservatives telling families to do for the other 10 to 11 months beyond what the government's money gives? The government would give \$1,960 but then families pay between \$10,000 and \$20,000 in child care costs. Are families actually going to be further ahead at the end of the day? No, they are not. They end up having to make really tough choices in our city of whether to lose one income and have one parent stay home, which puts a lot of strain on families and makes it hard to pay the mortgage. God forbid if the parents are also trying to help a kid through university or college, because of skyrocketing tuition fees. The Conservatives want to give \$1,960 but then let parents throw \$15,000 to \$20,000 a year into child care costs.

The NDP has an alternative plan of \$15 a day for child care that would actually be affordable for families and would let them make the right choices for their families, whether to have a parent stay home or have both parents work because they would have the option to do either. It would be good-quality child care. I started my working career in child care. I worked at the Not Your Average Daycare in Scarborough for five years, and I saw first-hand the importance of early education and learning.

The story does not end there. It gets worse. As we move forward through the years, the Conservatives' plan at the start would cost a few hundred million dollars, primarily of course to the wealthiest Canadians. The amazing thing is that this cost would grow with each passing year. In a relatively short time, the cost to Canadians would be \$20 billion to the treasury. I heard one of the parliamentary secretaries say the Conservatives do not want to pass on debt to the next generation, to our children. The Conservatives are doing something far worse. They are passing it to our children's children. They are passing it to our grandchildren. No responsible parent, grandparent or government should ever pass the buck along two generations down the line.

Of course, we have seen this approach with the government when we talk about climate change, which was not mentioned even once in the budget. We see that the Conservatives do not care. They have not put this as a priority. They said they are going to regulate sector by sector. Then the Prime Minister got up and said they are not going to touch the biggest polluter, the biggest sector, oil and gas.

The current government's entire philosophy is relying on the high price of oil, a commodity where the cost goes up and down. I worked in Fort McMurray, in the oil sands. I have been there through one of those turns. The folks there know that it is cyclical. The casino in Fort McMurray is called Boomtown Casino because they know that the price of oil and commodities goes boom or bust. However, the Conservatives were relying on the fact that it was going to boom forever. It is absolutely preposterous to be putting all their eggs in that one basket.

The Budget

•(1215)

We all know that we are supposed to diversify the economy. We are supposed to invest in different areas of the economy so that we can weather those storms, but the Conservatives never did that and now Canadians from coast to coast to coast are paying the price.

This budget should be helping people, but it is only helping the wealthy few and the rest are left to fend for themselves.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the budget is extraordinary for what is left out.

I want to mention something so that Canadians will know, because I continue to be astonished by what has been left out of the budgets over the last number of years. They do not contain what I used to regard as the nuts and bolts of a budget. There used to be tables at the back of the budget that showed what every department was going to get in total to spend in the year. There was a comparison to the previous year and also a rollout for a forthcoming period of years. This budget does not include that, and neither did last year's.

For instance, if we want to find out about international development assistance, another topic not mentioned in this budget, we cannot find that department. Of course, the department has now been folded into the Department of Foreign Affairs, but we cannot find the foreign affairs budget in here either. We cannot find the budgets for Environment Canada or Parks Canada.

There is actually no information about what each department of government will be allowed to spend compared to other years. We have to wait for the main and supplementary estimates for that.

I wonder if my colleague has any comments on that.

Mr. Dan Harris: Mr. Speaker, my first comment would be, what happened to that open and transparent government?

By removing the tables, by removing information, the Conservatives have made our jobs as members of Parliament harder, but they have also made it very difficult for Canadians to see what actually is and is not being spent. It is even more insidious than that, because it hides the money that the government is spending. This means it gives ministers and certain departments the ability to deliberately underspend their budgets. We only have to look at veterans affairs since the Conservatives took office. Instead of spending all the money it was allocated on improving veterans' lives, it ended up returning billions of dollars to the treasury, and that is shameful.

•(1220)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech.

I really liked the part where he told us that he is very familiar with the child care sector. Once again, that shows just how prepared we are on this side. We have a plan, whereas the other side of the House clearly has bad plans and it only helps their pals.

Like all Quebeckers, I spoke out against the lack of measures for culture and the environment, for example. It is pathetic that there is nothing for those areas.

Clearly, there comes a time when it is not only disappointing, but also worrisome to see that there is nothing—and I believe this is the topic of the day—for rail safety.

Would my colleague like to comment on that last point?

Mr. Dan Harris: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

Personally, I love taking the train. When I was young, I always took the train between Toronto and Montreal to visit my family. I also spent several summers in Lac-Mégantic, where my family has roots. In fact, my grandmother was born there and my mother was born in Sherbrooke.

It is therefore difficult for me to express how I felt when I saw the disaster that befell that town, a disaster that happened because the government cut corners. Fifty people died, and we must never let that happen again.

We must definitely make the safety of our railways, pipelines, airplanes and roads the top priority in order to prevent such disasters from happening in the future.

[*English*]

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague opposite why he is so against tax-free savings accounts. Why is he against allowing Canadians to save for their future, for their retirement and for their children's education? This is an opportunity to give Canadians that chance. Eleven million accounts have already been opened.

My next question is regarding his expensive bureaucratic child care program. How does he expect to pay for that? Will it be through a \$20 billion carbon tax?

Mr. Dan Harris: Mr. Speaker, maybe the member was not listening when I said that while 11 million accounts are open, only 11% of Canadians currently donate the maximum.

We are not opposed to TFSAs. We are not going to get rid of them. We just do not want to put in the increase the Conservatives have put in. There are other investment opportunities for people. If they are saving for their education, there are RESPs. If they are saving for their retirement or to buy their first home, there are RRSPs. There are other avenues for Canadians, if they have extra money, to put their money into to change their taxes.

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The specific benefit he is talking about would mostly go to wealthy Canadians who already have it easy. Why did the Conservatives not close loopholes for CEO stock options that cost the treasury \$750 million? There would be some of the money for child care. Why did they not cancel income splitting? There would be \$2.5 billion for child care. Why did they not increase corporate taxes to the rate where they would be paying their fair share? That would pay for roads, for transit and for child care.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to stand in this place to discuss the budget that is before the House. I only have a few minutes, so I would like to divide my remarks into, first, some general comments specifically relating to seniors, second, to speak to the health aspects of it, as I am the official opposition health critic, and third, to focus on British Columbia and the city of Victoria, which I represent.

On the general points, we have heard much this morning already about the income-splitting regime in this budget and the TFSA going from \$5,500 to \$10,000 a year. On top of that, of course, we have \$4,400 in new federal debt that every newborn child has and our grandchildren are going to have another \$15 billion or \$20 billion in debt created by the TFSA. It may be a laudable policy, but doubling contributions, or virtually doubling them, certainly will be helping wealthier Canadians more than others.

That has been the subject of much commentary, and not just by opposition politicians. It is important that Canadians know it is the Parliamentary Budget Officer who, just a day or so ago, drew attention to the disparity. My colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley pointed out yesterday that these handouts will cost tens of billions of dollars a year and the doubling of the TFSA itself will give the wealthiest 20% twice as much as all other Canadians combined.

The Globe and Mail, of course, has brought to our attention just what this document is. It is designed, as it says in its editorial of April 21, to win an election. That is really all it is. This is a document designed to give gifts to the Conservatives' wealthiest friends and donors in the hope that the rest of Canadians will not notice what is happening to our country in the meantime.

The Conservatives talked at one point about having a leaner, meaner tax code, cleaner and simpler. Of course, that has not happened. It is rare for me to stand in this place and agree with the Fraser Institute, but in a report that it put out just this week, it pointed out how the tax code has become bigger and bigger and more and more complex. It is great work for accountants and lawyers, I am sure, but it is incomprehensible to many Canadians. That is not the result of these little tax breaks and credits here, there and everywhere, what are called boutique tax credits, which litter this budget.

In addition, members have heard my colleagues talk about the fact that the contingency fund cupboard has been raided and it has gone from \$3 billion to \$1 billion in order to balance the budget. We have heard about the fire sale of GM shares in order to get more money to balance the budget, the holy grail of re-election.

The Globe and Mail said:

...one category of taxes remain far higher than it should: Employment Insurance premiums. These premiums are, basically, a tax on jobs. For years, Ottawa has

quietly been taking in several billion dollars more than it pays out. The budget promises a long-term plan to lower premiums....

Guess what? That, like so much in this budget, does not happen until 2017, 2018, 2019. We will hear about that in the context of transit and so many other issues. It is bad public policy. It is simply a gift for re-election purposes, and I am confident Canadians will see through this.

A day or so ago, the Canadian Alliance of United Seniors, which brings together dozens of seniors groups, talked about this budget in very unfavourable terms. It pointed out that income security, including restoring the old age security and GIS to age 65, should be enhanced. The Prime Minister went to Davos, Switzerland, and announced that the government was going to change the age for OAS to 67, which seems to me a little unfair to people who had the misfortune of being born after 1958, and no change to the Canada pension plan. That is a payroll tax, although it is not a tax at all, and that is why we cannot fix for the next generation the inequities. Nothing in the budget would deal with that. EI, of course, is okay, but CPP improvements are not.

Health care reform is the second thing that the Canadian Alliance of United Seniors has talked about. It asked for increased funding for issues such as home care and a national pharmacare plan. That notorious radical group, the Canadian Medical Association, has called for a seniors strategy on care and health care, something which, of course, the official opposition has been very much in favour of. The government has done nothing whatsoever on that score in this budget.

A national housing strategy is the third thing it asked for, a strategy to allow seniors stay in their homes or move to purpose-built affordable housing. There is very little, as so many critics have pointed out, on the affordable housing front in this budget.

● (1225)

There is very little for fighting inequality to assure all citizens, including seniors, can get out of poverty. That is a bit of a sleeper issue in the budget.

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Yesterday, Mr. Ian McGugan wrote in *The Globe and Mail* that there was a disparity increasingly among seniors, among the wealthy and the less wealthy. There was a lucky elite that could take advantage of TFSAs and the like, but that there was another group, a growing mass of retirees who must patch together their own safety net. Their prosperity or lack of it hinged on how much they could stow away in RRSPs, TFSAs and defined contribution pensions. If they happened to be in the wrong industry and suffered prolonged periods of unemployment, their retirement nest eggs would suffer through no fault of their own.

It is a tale of two cities among seniors in our communities. There is no doubt that the budget works for the wealthy seniors. We just have to ask the Parliamentary Budget Officer. However, for the vast majority of seniors who struggle to get by, with the low interest rate environment and so forth, it is a very different part of the world in which they live.

On health care, the College of Family Physicians of Canada talks about the federal budget as “a missed opportunity to advance health care”, and that is what it is. It, like the official opposition, are pleased with government’s commitment to a Canadian centre for aging and brain health innovation, but it says what is needed is “higher-level leadership for the entire spectrum of health care”, not a patchwork of single programs, and that is the point about the budget.

There are lots of little goodies here and there, boutique tax credits here, announcements there, innovation centre there, but on the main event it is a notorious and continuing lack of leadership on so many fronts.

Regarding the Canada health transfer, Conservatives keep talking about how much money is being transferred, and there is a lot of money being transferred, but much less than there would have been if they had not killed the Health Council a few years ago. The government sees no benefit in doing anything that involves leadership and working with the provinces to achieve better results for our population.

There is much more about health that needs to be said in this context, and not only the fact Conservatives are sticking to the unilateral formula for the health transfer, axing the Health Council and showing no leadership in public health issues for Canadians. However, the one good thing is that the mandate of the Mental Health Commission of Canada has been renewed. We need to see a lot more leadership in that area. I salute the government for that aspect of the health care issue. However, money is really what has to be important.

I promised to talk about British Columbia. It has been said over and over again that climate change is a foreign concept in the budget, it is a word that dare not be mentioned by Conservatives. I think they do not believe it exists. The word “Victoria” did not get mentioned and for British Columbia, pretty thin gruel. British Columbians will remember a few weeks ago, when the government in its zeal to save \$700,000 thought it was sound public policy to close the Kitsilano Coast Guard. That \$700,000 should be matched in people’s minds with the \$7.5 million Conservatives will spend to advertise the budget.

Budgets are about priorities. Governing is about choosing. The government chose to put our coastline at risk for a small savings. We see the results. Thank goodness they were not worse, but \$7.5 million for feel good ads is what will happen.

What is not in the budget? Money for transit that comes forward many years later. There is nothing for local roads and bridges, nothing for the Belleville Street terminal in my riding, which everyone agrees is the number one infrastructure, not even a signal that it might occur sometime, no money in gang violence prevention and so forth.

This is a budget that works very well for the wealthy. It does not make the kind of long-term investments in health care that will be necessary going into the future. Seniors groups have understood that it helps only a small segment of their population. For British Columbia, it reflects priorities that British Columbians simply do not have.

• (1230)

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague mentioned employment insurance premiums and rates and how they were too high. When we introduced the small business job credit, which is a significant reduction in EI premiums for small businesses, in fact, 700,000 small businesses in Canada will benefit from that, why did the member and his party voted against that reduction in premiums?

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, the government is famous, and Canadians see right through it, for what we call the poison pill strategy.

What it does is it puts a lot of things in a budget that would appear to be things we could support, and then it puts poison pills in that no serious opposition could ever support. That may be an example of that, I do not know.

Let us remember this. What I was saying about the employment insurance fund was not me talking, I was talking about *The Globe and Mail* saying how the government, “has quietly been taking in several billion dollars more than it pays out”.

That is another nefarious way the government has used to create this mystique of a balanced budget. It has raided a contingency fund, used the EI fund as a piggy bank and sold GM shares just in time to create this magical illusion. I think Canadians understand what is going on.

• (1235)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pick up on the member’s last statement because his so correct.

When we look at it, even before the recession occurred a number of years ago, the government entered into a situation where we went from a surplus budget to a deficit situation. It has been in that deficit situation for years now.

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Then when we are in an election year, the Conservatives wave a wand to try to give Canadians this impression, spending a lot of money to tell Canadians, that there is a surplus. The way the surplus was created was through the wholesale sale of GM shares and dipping into the contingency fund, for a marginal surplus that could evaporate depending on the price of oil.

Would the member provide his thoughts in regard to how much a falsehood it is to give Canadians the impression, in the time of an election, that the books are in good order when it comes to balanced budgets?

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, I can do no better than quote the headline of *The Globe and Mail* editorial to which I referred. It states, "This budget was designed to win an election". I think the member for Winnipeg North and me understand what that is about.

Imagine a government that spends a decade with deficits, huge debt, and all of a sudden, on the eve of an election, announces that, there is a surplus. Then we are told that we are getting it by way of raiding a contingency fund, selling shares and using the EI fund.

I think Canadians understand that this is really about an election promise. Much of the goodies that we are hoping will happen, goodies that are essential in places like Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal and my community of Victoria, to deal with transit, for example, will not happen for many years.

All of the good stuff is back end loaded with these great promises but, hallelujah, the government has balanced the budget. I am sure Canadians see through that.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, could my colleague tell us more about his thoughts on the proposed investment in public transit announced in budget 2015? The government is proposing just \$250 million, which will start in 2017 and will then be gradually increased.

What does the member think about this new funding that will not start until 2017 and of the amount of this investment, compared to the scope of the problems with public transit in our Canadian cities?

[English]

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, most Canadians understand that we have a crisis in our major cities with crumbling infrastructure and particularly problems with transit.

I noted that the Ontario finance minister referred to the transit part of this budget as "crumbs". Recognizing that we need help now, the government, wanting to balance the budget at all costs, has decided that this stuff will start after the election, and the \$1 billion is two years after that. Then all of a sudden we are supposed to be happy. Let us not forget, we have to work with P3s, private-public partnerships, which often cost more money and reward friends of the government.

It is a happy package for everybody but the people who need transit services now.

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for York Centre.

It is a pleasure for me to rise in the House today and speak to a budget of which all Canadians can be proud. It is a balanced budget. This is a great accomplishment. Canada is not where it is at today by chance. The budget did not balance itself. It was hard work, careful financial planning and prudent fiscal responsibility on the part of the strong leadership of our country that we can boast of a balanced budget.

We went from a deficit of \$55.6 billion at the height of the global recession to a projected surplus of \$1.4 billion for 2015-16. Canada is the envy of many countries right around the world. Over 1.2 million net new jobs have been created since the depths of the recession. Despite what the opposition would like Canadians to believe, over 80% of these were full-time jobs, and nearly 80% were in the private sector. Over half of these jobs were in high wage industries.

Canada's economy has seen one of the best economic performances among all the G7 countries in recent years, both during the recession and throughout the recovery. As a business owner myself, I am pleased that Canada's business investment performance has been the strongest in the G7. We leapt from sixth place to second place in Bloomberg's ranking of the most attractive countries for business to grow. For the seventh straight year, we have also ranked with the soundest banking system. That ranking was given to us by the World Economic Forum. We are also one of two countries in the G7 to have a rock solid AAA credit rating.

I could go on and on about the many great things that our government has accomplished.

Most Canadians understand and personally strive for such things as a balanced budget and a good credit rating. They understand well the benefits of achieving this on the federal level as well. Running a surplus, having a sound banking system and having a AAA credit rating makes our country more attractive to investors, and that opens up the doors that lead to more growth.

Running a surplus also means more tax breaks for Canadians who need and deserve them the most. The opposition continues to say that our tax breaks benefit the wealthy. That, quite simply, is not true. Canadian families across the nation with children up to the age of 17 will feel the advantage of enhancements to the universal child care benefit directly when payments begin this coming July.

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Across Canada, there exists a significant diversity of people living in a very diverse landscape. We have people of many ethnicities, cultures and religions. We have people who live in very remote places up north and who live in the busy urban centres of our major cities. The universal child care benefit includes all Canadians and accommodates Canada's diversity. It is not required that children be placed in state operated child care centres to benefit. Families benefit while maintaining the freedom to choose the way their children are raised, whether they be with a stay-at-home parent, at a day care centre, or with a friend or family member.

We are allowing families to choose what works best for them, decisions that are best left for mom and dad.

The opposition also continues to purport that tax-free savings accounts benefit the very wealthy. Again, that simply is not true. Individuals with incomes of less than \$80,000 accounted for more than 80% of all TFSA holders, and about half of TFSA holders had annual incomes of less than \$42,000. At the end of 2013, about 1.9 million Canadians had contributed the maximum amount to their TFSAs. Of those who contributed, 45% were seniors and over 70% were over the age of 55.

I am pleased that economic action plan 2015 proposes to increase the TFSA contribution limit to \$10,000. Our government understands the importance of saving money and of financial security.

• (1240)

The TFSA provides greater savings incentives for low- and modest-income individuals, because in addition to the tax savings, neither the income earned in the TFSA nor withdrawals from it affect eligibility for federal income-tested benefits and credits such as the Canada child tax benefit or old age security.

Another component of economic action plan 2015 I would like to highlight and that I am particularly proud of is the extension of compassionate care benefits. This budget proposes to provide up to \$37 million annually to extend employment insurance compassionate care benefits from six weeks now to six months. I know first hand people in my riding who would benefit from this extension.

People who have cared for a gravely ill family member know the incredible demands involved. It can be mentally, physically, and emotionally draining. They also know that caring for a family member, especially at the end of his or her life, is a responsibility they would not want to leave in the hands of anyone else. Unfortunately, I have witnessed people who have had to quit their jobs to care for a family member, adding financial hardship to the struggles they are already facing. Through this enhancement, the government would ensure that the employment insurance program would continue to help Canadians when they needed it the most. Canadians should never have to choose between family and financial security.

I am pleased that so many people in my riding would benefit from the emphasis this budget places on families. In addition, coming from a riding that has a large farming community, I am happy that the budget would also positively affect the backbone of our community, farmers. Economic action plan 2015 proposes to increase the lifetime capital gains exemption for qualified farm or fishing property to \$1 million.

The lifetime capital gains exemption for farm or fishing property provides an incentive to invest in the development of productive farm and fishing businesses and helps farm and fishing business owners accumulate and protect capital for retirement. It is estimated that this measure would reduce capital gains taxes for owners of farm and fishing businesses by about \$50 million over the 2015-16 to 2019-20 period. There are many farmers in my riding who would benefit directly from this increase.

Our government is also committed to promoting Canadian products. Agricultural and agri-food products produced in Canada are among the safest and highest quality in the world. That is why economic action plan 2015 proposes to provide \$12 million over two years, starting in 2016, to expand Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's agrimarketing program to promote and differentiate Canadian products in a highly competitive global and domestic market. Promoting Canadian products here and abroad would have a positive impact on our farmers and food processors.

• (1245)

As Canada continues to grow, it is necessary that we continue to maintain the critical infrastructure that keeps our country running smoothly. It seems only appropriate that as we celebrate the 150th anniversary of Confederation, we support the renovation, expansion, and improvement of existing community infrastructure. Economic action plan 2015 proposes to create a new dedicated infrastructure fund for exactly that purpose to celebrate our 150th anniversary. These new investments, which would be cost-shared with municipalities, community organizations, and not-for-profit entities, would support projects that celebrate our shared heritage, create jobs, and improve the quality of life of Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

On a final note, I would like to commend our government for listening to the concerns of Canadians. As a sitting member of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, I sat through the vigorous study of Bill C-51, the anti-terrorism act. We listened carefully to expert witness testimony and have proposed appropriate corresponding amendments. One concern voiced many times over was that we needed to enhance oversight of our Canadian Security Intelligence Service review body. I am pleased that our government heard those concerns and has responded. Economic action plan 2015 proposes to provide up to \$12.5 million over five years, starting in this next fiscal year, and \$2.5 million ongoing thereafter, in additional funding for the Security Intelligence Review Committee to enhance its review of CSIS.

While we ensure that our national security agencies have the tools they need to protect Canadians from the threat of terrorism, we would also ensure that these practices would be governed by an effective and transparent framework that would protect the rights and freedoms of individual Canadians.

I am thankful for the opportunity to speak to this budget.

• (1250)

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

The Budget

The problem is that he claimed that this budget is for all Canadians. I remind the member that the maximum RRSP deduction is \$21,000; the TFSA limit is now \$10,000; the RESP limit is \$5,000; and the deduction for sports and arts is \$2,000. That is a total of \$38,000, yet 90% of Canadians do not have \$38,000 of net income. For someone to take advantage of that \$38,000 in tax breaks and to still have the means to pay rent and buy groceries—which are kind of important—they would have to earn over \$150,000. Just 2% to 3% of Canadians earn that amount. When the government brings in such big tax breaks, they benefit just 2% to 3% of Canadians. Another example is income splitting, which is also not designed for the vast majority of Canadians.

Could my colleague explain why the government wants us to go without this money now and to leave our grandchildren with a \$140 billion bill? Where is the tax fairness here?

[English]

Mr. Ted Falk: Mr. Speaker, the biggest users of the TFSA program are seniors. They have found that program extremely useful and have benefited greatly from being able to put money into tax-free savings accounts to shelter some of the income that is so desperately needed in their retirement years from income tax. There was a demand for that, and I am sure our seniors are going to appreciate this measure, because it is a measure that is specifically used by that group of people.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a great deal of concern about the federal budget. When I think of how I would try to put it, I would suggest that it is a very unfair budget.

This is a budget that would do nothing to support Canada's middle class or people who aspire to become members of the middle class. There would not be any investment in a tangible way in infrastructure, when we know that virtually every municipality in every region of the country is in need of infrastructure spending, not two years from now, after the election, but this year so that they can be developing infrastructure this summer, not to mention the previous years when the government failed to deliver.

My question for the member relates to the Minister of Finance making reference to letting the Prime Minister's granddaughter deal with the issue. Does he not believe that there is a responsibility for the Government of Canada to start governing for today, not pass off issues to our grandchildren?

Mr. Ted Falk: Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Budget Officer today said that our grandchildren will not be saddled with the burden of that responsibility. I think that comment was taken out of context, and the Parliamentary Budget Officer has added clarification on that issue today.

In reference to his question about the middle class, this budget would do so much for the middle class. I am thinking of the universal child care benefit. The biggest beneficiaries of the universal child care benefit would be low- and middle-income families. For every child under the age of six, each family would get \$2,000 annually. For children between the ages of six and 17, they would get \$720 annually. As a percentage of income, the middle-class and low-income earners would be the biggest beneficiaries of that program.

In addition, we are not mandating that people send their children to a daycare to be recipients of that money. It is a very fair way of saying that they can choose to invest that money in a state-funded daycare, or they can choose to invest that money with a friend or a relative down the way who is willing to look after their children while they seek employment, or they can just use that money to subsidize their household budgets if they are stay-at-home parents. That is one of the most fair and appropriate tax measure in this budget for low- and middle-income families.

• (1255)

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in the House today to speak to our budget, strong leadership, a balanced budget, and the low-tax plan for jobs, growth, and security.

We live in the greatest country on earth: Canada. People come here from all over the world for a variety of reasons, but most importantly, they come to Canada for hope and opportunity. Yes, they want opportunity for themselves, but more importantly, they want opportunity and hope for their children.

The riding I am so privileged to represent, York Centre, is very ethnocultural. I go around the community endlessly, time and time again, and what I see reminds me of when I was young, when my dad came to Canada as an immigrant and how hard he worked, and how hard new immigrants to Canada work. When I shake the hands of some of these men, these hands are worn. These hands have blisters. These hands are hardened by the hard work they do because they want to see their kids succeed in the hope and opportunity Canada has to offer.

We see this paying off. When I go to high school graduations, which I do every June in the riding of York Centre, I see kids whose parents came to Canada just a few years ago, and they are the ones who are getting all the scholarships to universities and colleges. They will be the doctors, the lawyers, the professionals, and the tradespeople of tomorrow.

I remember, growing up, when I would wait for my dad to come home late at night. He had a shoe store, and I remember peering through the window blinds waiting for him to come home. When I saw him pull into the driveway and get out of the car, I got so excited, and I know that these kids do too. As tired as he was, he still had time to play with me or do homework with me, just like these kids today in the riding of York Centre whose parents come from another country. That is what Canada is all about.

That is why we have presented here today, and since 2006, a path and a plan for economic prosperity in Canada. It is so immigrants will have opportunity and can have hope for their children.

We have presented a plan here in the House for debate today that is based on low taxes, on trade, and on a balanced budget. Why is it important to balance the budget? The opposition parties do not think it is important. We cannot really blame New Democrats. They are blinded by their ideology, an ideology of spend, spend, spend. Spend as if we have it, is their ideology. What is the Liberals' ideology? They are still searching for one, but they do have a set of principles, and if we do not like those, they have a whole other set for us.

The Budget

Let me tell the House a bit about our plan, a plan for jobs, for growth, and for long-term prosperity. Our plan has created 1.2 million net new jobs since the depth of the recession in July 2009. Our financial sector has been rated by the World Economic Forum for the seventh year in a row to be the soundest in the world. We have lowered taxes not 50 times, not 100 times, and not even 150 times. We have lowered 180 different taxes. We have taken over one million people off the tax rolls altogether. We have brought in income splitting for seniors so they can split their pensions and do not have to pay as much tax.

Now we see that the Liberals and the New Democrats are against the proposals we have in this budget to put more money in the pockets of hard-working Canadian families. They seem to be under the impression that the government treasury will have less money. We know what that means. First, they have to understand that this is not the government's money. My dad and these dads and moms in York Centre who are working hard, that is their money. They have earned it. They say that the government will be out of that money.

• (1300)

The taxpayers would have more money to spend how they see fit. Let us not forget that, when our government introduced the universal child care benefit, it was the Liberals who got up and said people would just use it to buy beer and popcorn. What an outrage. People are using this money to pay for education for their children, and if they so choose, to pay for daycare for their children. It is about choice. It is about putting kids with the experts, those who know how to raise them. That is not the government, Liberals, or NDP. That is mum and dad. They are the experts on how to raise children.

Our fiscal plan is sound. It makes sense and it is working. We do not know the opposition's fiscal plan. We know the Liberal's is smoking marijuana, for one, but the NDP plan is to raise taxes and spend recklessly. Both these plans fail the first test of fiscal responsibility, which is that the numbers just do not add up. New Democrats just want to tax and spend because they think there is an endless supply of money out there. Well, that chicken has been plucked. There are no feathers left. There is only one taxpayer, and taxpayers are maxed out. That is why we are lowering taxes. That is why we see people spending more money.

We have lowered corporate taxes. The NDP seems to think we need to raise corporate taxes. We do not. It does not understand that corporations, artificial entities, do not pay taxes. Taxes are passed down to the end user, which is the consumer, so middle-class Canadians pay higher prices because corporate taxes are higher. Therefore, we lowered those taxes. Now we find that corporate investment in Canada is way up. Corporate taxes are way up and there are more jobs as a result. That, at the end of the day, is doing our job.

Canadians sent us here in 2006, 2008, and 2011 to get the job done, and that is what we are doing. We made a pledge to the Canadian people that we were going to provide jobs, growth, and long-term prosperity, and that is exactly what we are doing. We are going to be the first government in the G7 to balance our budget, and not just balance it—we will have a surplus of \$1.4 billion.

The opposition parties are very fast at criticizing what we do, and they propose these kinds of wacky schemes like carbon taxes and

one-size-fits-all daycare where there is no choice. They do not understand the reality, and when we try to explain it to them, they just want to double down on what they know is wrong, or they should know it is wrong. That is why it is incumbent on us, the government, the Conservative Party, who know that Canadians deserve to keep more of their hard-earned money in their pockets so they can decide how to spend it. It is not to create big bureaucracies to spend and tax wildly with reckless disregard for the future.

Success is not by chance, but it is by choice, and we have been making the right choices since 2006. That is why we are not mired in recession, as are other countries around the world. If it were up to the opposition, it would have us right at the edge, like Greece.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Thanks to Paul Martin.

Mr. Mark Adler: Mr. Speaker, we did not balance any budgets on the backs of the most vulnerable, like the Martin and Liberal Party did in the 1990s. Even in those heydays of economic prosperity, they could never get the unemployment rate below 7%. Ours is lower today, while our economy is still fragile.

We have made the right choices as a government. The Canadian people sent us here. We made a pledge to them in three successive elections that we would balance the budget, create jobs, and lower taxes. That is exactly what we have done, and we are proud to take this platform to the Canadian people come October.

• (1305)

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I find it quite interesting that the member says that the NDP does not have any real propositions or ideas coming forward; yet every single thing he has touted as good in this budget is an NDP proposal that the Conservatives voted against every time it came up for a vote before. Now, the Conservatives are saying it is their brilliant idea.

My question is about one of the brilliant ideas that the New Democrats have. That is to create universal child care in this country that would cost parents a maximum of \$15 a day. Doing some quick math, for 20 days a month, that would mean a family's cost for child care would be \$300 a month.

The statistics right now show that an average family in Toronto is paying \$1,676 per month for child care. The NDP would offer savings of \$1,376 per month for these families; whereas, the member and his party are saying the Conservatives would give them \$100. The NDP is saying we would save them—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please.

The hon. member for York Centre.

Mr. Mark Adler: Mr. Speaker, I want to respond to that.

The Budget

Logic alone would tell us that, if these ideas were proposed in the past, they would be policy today. I do not know where the member is coming from when she talks about proposing policies that we are now adopting, but I would caution the New Democrats on one thing. It is this party here that we have to be careful of. They used to call the NDP “Liberals in a hurry”. I would keep an eye on these guys. People should not be worried about us stealing their policies.

What we offer Canadians is choice. We are not saying they cannot send their kids to daycare, but we are giving mums and dads the option. We are offering the money and they can send their kids to daycare or, if they want, they can raise them themselves. The New Democrats should imagine not having government raise their children. What a unique concept.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with wonderment to the remarks of my colleague from the Conservative Party.

First, the budget was delayed by the current government well into the next fiscal year for one reason: the Conservatives had to sell the GM shares and book those revenues for \$2.2 billion to achieve an illusory surplus of \$1.4 billion, on the eve of an election.

Going forward, the Conservatives' budget projections for the future are based on oil prices increasing by 50%. Nobody saw oil prices dropping by 50%, but the current government is actually basing its fiscal projections on increases in oil prices of 50%.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer and the Bank of Canada are using much lower figures in their projections for oil prices. As a result of that, the PBO is projecting budget deficits in 2017-2018, 2018-2019, and 2019-2020.

Does the hon. member actually believe that rosy projections and wishful thinking are a replacement for sound budget practices? Why is the government making—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. We are out of time in this time for questions and comments. The hon. member for York Centre.

Mr. Mark Adler: Mr. Speaker, we have a phrase in Yiddish. The word is “chutzpah”. This is a great demonstration of a question that is based on chutzpah, which loosely translated means rashness or nerve to ask such a thing.

Did members know that a Liberal budget was introduced into this House on February 16, 1999? In the following fiscal year, in 2000-2001, lo and behold, there was no Liberal budget presented by the government. Then, the following fiscal year, two and a half years after the Liberals introduced the budget on February 16, 1999, they got around to introducing their next budget. It was two and a half years.

• (1310)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. We are resuming debate with the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert.

[Translation]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Rivière-du-Nord.

The Conservative government promised a balanced budget that would benefit all Canadians. Instead, it presented a budget filled with election goodies. In the past four years, we on this side of the House have gotten used to seeing propagandist bills. However, the fact that the Conservatives presented a completely populist budget just to win votes in the election this fall is simply mind-blowing.

The budget is balanced because the Conservatives scraped up money by draining the contingency reserve and selling shares. They are using *House of Cards* as their inspiration as they scrounge for loose change, the same way they took their statistics from Kijiji.

They are promising measures that will not take effect until much later on. However, income splitting will take effect immediately. This government is dishonest. Believe me when I say that Canadians are not fools. They understand that the Conservatives' promises are worthless, not to mention that the budget promises came late this year, just like spring.

I was elected to defend the interests of the people of Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert. I am obliged to tell them that this budget fails them. It is failing Quebeckers.

Let us talk about health. Health is being dealt a blow again this year. The government still has not understood the importance of investing in health. It does not understand that thousands of Quebeckers will not be able to pay for their health care costs, much like it does not understand that investing in health is investing in our country's economic future.

Treating a person over the age of 65 costs five times more than treating a person between the ages of 15 and 65. This government is failing our seniors, middle-class Canadians and the poorest members of our society, who will not have access to proper health care.

Quebeckers can only manage a hollow laugh because Canada must respect the Canada Health Act, which provides for universal health care. That means that all Canadians have the right to free public health care. However, how can the provinces apply these principles if cuts are being made to their funding?

The Conservative government is ignoring the provinces' desperate needs. It has refused to take Quebec's rapidly aging population into account when calculating health transfer amounts. Health transfers will no longer go up by 6% per year. They will be capped at 3%. This means a heavier burden for the provinces. The Conservatives are depriving the provinces of thousands of dollars. Canadians deserve better. They deserve a good health system.

Clearly the government does not understand a thing about health. It expects people to be happy with a few piddly programs when staff, nurses and doctors are in short supply and people are not getting the care they need at the right time.

The Budget

•(1315)

Medical clinics are closing. Three clinics have already closed in my riding, Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, and another will be closing this year. That is unacceptable. The federal government must adhere to the principles in the Canada Health Act. If the Conservative government is unable to maintain a formula that enables the provinces and territories to pay for universal access to quality care, it should let us take over. We on this side of the House will listen and sit down with the provinces to come up with solutions that fit.

The NDP has a plan to strengthen our health system because we all deserve access to quality care no matter where we live. In 2013, I introduced Bill C-523, which called for the mandatory reporting of drug shortages. The Conservative government voted against that bill, then last February, it announced that it would require drug companies to report drug shortages in advance.

I was delighted that the government had finally seen the light on such an important issue. However, I was very disappointed to find no sign of the announcement about drug shortages in the budget. There is nothing about that in the budget, and certainly no investment. Simply put, the government is dishonest. It makes big announcements, but that is all it knows how to do. There comes a time when you have to stop making promises and get out the chequebook.

Let us talk about infrastructure. Freight trains and oil cars go through Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert. The hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie and I have talked to our constituents, who have all said that they are very concerned about the lack of investment in rail safety. The Minister of Transport promised that the government would invest in enhancing safety, but where is that investment in budget 2015? Where are the promises of tangible measures to ensure the safe transportation of hazardous materials? Where is the increase in the number of inspectors? Unfortunately, I do not see any of that.

Nor is there anything about the Champlain Bridge. There are no details as to the cost of the toll or how this toll will affect the other bridges. We gathered more than 1,000 signatures in Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert alone from people denouncing this arbitrary measure. That is more than 1,000 locals who have spoken out against this toll, and thousands more if we include the south shore, but the government does not seem to think that what they have to say matters. My colleagues from the south shore and I are going to have to explain to our constituents why they are not important enough for the government to listen to them.

Let us talk about public transit. The government boasts about having good ideas in its budget to address public transit. The Conservatives' proposed measures for public transit are limited, and the provisions are so complicated that they will prevent funding from getting to the municipalities. The budget is out of step with what the south shore mayors want. They say that improving public transit, the light rail system, and extending the metro to Longueuil are priorities for the local economy and the shift toward sustainable development. What is more, the money for public transit will not be available for another two years, provided there is a contribution from the private sector.

Canadians expect budgets to address their priorities. They expect budgets to provide their children with the best possible start in life

and create good jobs. The Conservative government is walking on thin ice. It is Quebeckers and middle-class workers who are paying the price.

•(1320)

Two words come to mind when I read the budget: “dishonesty” and “improvisation”.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member made reference to what is a very important issue to me, that being health care. When I think of social issues that are important not only to my constituents but to all Canadians, it is the issue of health care. We believe very passionately in our health care system. I know that Canadians treasure it and feel very disappointed that the federal government has not been able, through a first ministerial conference or through ministers of health coming together, to come up with a health care accord.

There was a great deal of satisfaction in the Paul Martin era where we had a health care accord. We had the provinces working with Ottawa to recognize one of the most important social issues that Canadians feel very passionate about.

Could the member comment on the government's failure to recognize how important health care is to Canadians by not getting a new health care accord and working with provinces on this very important issue?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Mr. Speaker, I thank my Liberal colleague for his relevant question.

The accords required that the Conservative government sit down and listen to the provinces and territories talk about their needs and priorities. We have asked the government many times not to impose measures arbitrarily.

Clearly, nothing has been done. We have not seen even the slightest political will to listen to the provinces and territories regarding the issue of health transfers.

I think the following metaphor is quite fitting: our free public health care system seems to be in palliative care. It is as though we were trying to save something that is already dead.

The Conservative government does not understand that Canada has an aging population and that, ultimately, having high-quality health care when we need it will be a heavy burden for the provinces to bear.

[*English*]

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her passionate speech about health care and about public transport also. I would like to talk to her about public transportation and the need for more investment in the public transit infrastructure.

The Budget

We know that within the next five years, Canada will have an \$18-billion infrastructure gap specifically for public transit needs in our communities. I am asking with a Toronto lens because we know that in Toronto we are seeing our bridges and roads literally crumble down before our eyes. I am sure that she is facing a very similar situation in the Montreal region also. Would she comment on some of the NDP proposals to improve infrastructure or with respect to public transit funding specifically?

• (1325)

[Translation]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

As I mentioned in my speech, the government claims it is investing in infrastructure. Unfortunately, those funds will not be accessible this year and actually not until four years from now.

I also said that infrastructure is important. In my region on the south shore, in the greater Longueuil, Saint-Bruno and Saint-Hubert area, all the mayors agree that we need money for infrastructure.

How are our provinces and municipalities supposed to function with this aging infrastructure? It is important to act now, and that is what we on this side of the House, the NDP, want to do.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, here we are with the Conservative government on its way out. I am sure that the government would have liked to finish its term with a bang, but instead it is fizzling out.

Just about everywhere, the Conservatives are calling the balanced budget a fantastic achievement. Unfortunately, it is not an achievement. How did they balance their budget? Once again they took money from the employment insurance fund. They are not the first to do so. The Liberals did the same thing. I remember the days when the Martin-Chrétien duo tackled the deficit. They took the federal deficit and passed it on to the provinces and the provinces passed it on to the health system. Since then, our health system has been posting a deficit. The deficit only moved somewhere else. It is no longer in the columns of federal government figures, but it is somewhere else. They are presenting that as a fantastic achievement.

We must not forget that behind all that, what is putting the government in a precarious position is the fact that since 2006, the Conservatives have cut corporate taxes from 21% to 15%. This money has been accumulating in the coffers of major corporations and depriving us of resources. That was a significant source of tax revenue. Unfortunately for the Conservative strategy, it did not work. That money accumulated in the corporations' cash reserves, which means that there are currently \$660 billion to \$700 billion that were not reinvested. We can look at the situation of our manufacturing production systems. Corporations did not reinvest this money to improve their productivity with robotics or informatics. No, they waited. Why? Because the economic situation was unstable. Consequently, these tax reductions did not help Canada's economic recovery. That is quite the accomplishment.

A government must make choices. In the few minutes I have, I will try to show that the government has chosen to help those who are well off.

Take, for example, income splitting, which our Conservative friends love so much. This measure will not benefit 86% of the population. I did a little calculation. A family that earns \$120,000—one person earns \$100,000 and the other earns \$20,000—will pay \$1,807 less in taxes. However, a family that earns \$50,000—one person earns \$35,000 and the other earns \$15,000—will get what kind of tax break? Nothing. It is very clear that these measures are essentially geared towards the wealthy. A government must make choices, and this government made this choice.

Meanwhile, the \$1.5 billion that this measure will cost in terms of tax expenditures is the amount it would take to bring seniors out of extreme poverty. Right now in Canada we have seniors who are forced to go to food banks for food because the guaranteed income supplement and their small pension are not enough. The government could have taken this \$1 billion and invested it to help bring our seniors out of poverty, but no, it would rather help a small fraction of the population that is already well off and does not need this measure to survive.

The government also made a choice with employment insurance. It is once again dipping into the EI fund. In his report, the Parliamentary Budget Officer said that with this money, the government could have increased the EI wage replacement rate from 55% to 68%. On average, EI recipients receive \$440 in benefits to live on.

The government could have implemented another measure on something I have a personal interest in, since someone very close to me has cancer. This person received 15 weeks of employment insurance and is now living off their meagre savings because they are not eligible for last-resort assistance. The government could have implemented some sort of measure to ensure that this person had access to EI throughout their treatment, but no, it chose not to. Instead, the government dipped into the EI fund and is using that money to balance the budget.

• (1330)

They are not the first to have done that. When the Martin-Chrétien duo came to power, 60% of unemployed workers could get employment insurance. We pay premiums, as do employers, to help unemployed workers during their unemployment so they can have the time they need to find work. Back then, 60% of those people had access to employment insurance.

When the Conservatives came to power, the rate was 46%. The Liberals had already chipped away at that margin because they filched \$50 billion from the employment insurance surplus. We need to remember that. The election is coming soon.

The Budget

That funny guy over there talked about the middle class. What does he know about the middle class? When has he ever lost his job and waited a month for his first employment insurance cheque, unable to pay his power bill or his rent? He does not know the first thing about that. The only people who have been through that are the people around me, the people who belong to the only party that stands up for ordinary people who have had actual ordinary people problems.

Right now, what percentage of people have access to employment insurance? It has dropped to 38% under the wonderful Conservatives, who also balanced their budget using that money. The other thing they are going to do to balance their budget is scrounge money from federal employees' sick leave. I think that federal employees have really felt the pinch since the Conservatives have been in power. Some 19,000 jobs have been cut. People everywhere are working hard and burning out, so now what is the government doing? It is taking away their sick leave. That is no great achievement.

What would be an achievement is delivering a budget that cares about ordinary people and helps them get by, helps them get from one week to the next with enough money to cover their expenses. An achievement would be delivering a budget that includes measures to reduce people's indebtedness. Right now, people are going into debt because the big banks are taking advantage of them and interest rates are too high. We have to find a way to get out of the debt spiral, which is not good for anyone.

Now that I have finished my heated speech, I am available to answer questions.

[English]

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will ask the member a couple of questions.

It is our Conservative government that has increased health and social transfers to provinces to historic highs all while balancing the budget. Unlike the Liberals, we did not balance the budget by slashing transfers.

If NDP members are serious about health care, will they support budget 2015? More importantly, if NDP members are serious about helping seniors, will they support measures in the budget, like the companion care benefits and the change to the RRIFs?

• (1335)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Mr. Speaker, contrary to what my colleague across the way claims, health care transfers for the next 10 years will be cut by \$36 billion. The percentage increase in health transfers does not match the percentage increase in health care costs. The provinces are headed straight into a brick wall.

Canadians need a government that recognizes this. We in the NDP are committed to maintaining health transfers at 6%, which will allow the provincial health care systems to survive the situation.

[English]

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question follows in the same vein as the last question.

It is baffling to me that the Conservative member asked if the NDP would support the RRIFs as well as the increase in the time from six weeks to six months for EI compassionate care benefits, because both of these proposals came from the NDP. We brought them forward and when they came to a vote, the Conservatives voted against them. Now the Conservatives have included these proposals in the budget, among a plethora of other things. These are two of the good things in the budget, and yes, they are good things that came from the NDP.

I would like my hon. colleague to comment on some of the other good measures that are NDP proposals that are in this budget.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Mr. Speaker, I dare say that the only good measures in this budget came from the NDP.

This morning in committee, we met with the Parliamentary Budget Officer and we were examining TFSAs. Have Canadians been saving more since TFSAs were introduced? Canadians are not saving more. There has been an increase in tax-free savings primarily among the 15% of the population who reach the maximum. However, there has been no increase overall. There has been a shift in savings. Savings that used to be placed in other kinds of funds are being redirected to TFSAs. However, there has been no net gain in savings. On the contrary, the Governor of the Bank of Canada said that the household debt ratio is rising and will continue to rise.

Clearly, this is merely an election-minded measure, although it is not fooling anyone. What we want is a budget that really helps people in need.

[English]

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the member's comments, but he was asked a question by my colleague about health care spending specifically, and I would like to understand the NDP's math. I would like to understand how an increase in health care transfers, which is what our government has scheduled in the foreseeable future, an increase every year, could be somehow interpreted by the NDP as being a decrease. We have to get beyond the party's talking points and get to the math. Apparently the NDP has a little trouble with math because the reality is there is an increase.

In fact, in Alberta, it is a 145% increase in transfers from the federal government to the provincial government, a two-and-a-half-times increase since we came to office in 2006. By anybody's math, that is an increase, and that will continue with an increase every year.

I would like to understand the NDP's math when the NDP says that somehow this federal government has reduced or will reduce health care transfers to the provinces, because it is not true.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Mr. Speaker, based on past promises to maintain an increase of 6% for health transfers and based on the Conservatives' plan to reduce it to 3%, overall, there will be \$36 billion less in the provinces' coffers. That is easy to understand.

The Budget

It is not complicated; the federal government will transfer proportionally less than it is currently transferring. It is as simple as that. A little lesson on the rule of three would be good for everyone here.

• (1340)

[English]

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Whitby—Oshawa.

I am dedicating the 10 minutes I have to speak to the budget today to my friend Darrel Wong, who passed away much too young on the weekend. Darrel was the very long-time president of the large International Woodworkers local in Courtenay, British Columbia, and subsequently the Steelworkers local after the unions merged.

We collaborated on many issues. Our goal was the same: to represent our constituents. He represented his membership at all times. Perhaps his greatest triumph was to negotiate the Coast Sustainability Trust, a \$35 million fund to assist union and non-union members, their families and communities, including first nations communities on the coast.

I am reminded of our collaboration by the upcoming softwood lumber agreement anniversary in October, as 10 years ago, we held a series of joint press conferences in B.C. and Ottawa, pushing for free trade in lumber with the United States. Of course, two-thirds of our production is exported, and two-thirds of our export goes to the U.S. That was a very important measure.

Darrel was non-partisan because he wanted to work in the best interests of the larger community, and he succeeded. The proof was in the pudding, which is why he was re-elected so many times by the membership.

I am pleased to see in the budget that the forest sector, which contributes \$21 billion to Canada's GDP, is recognized with a provision to extend for two years the innovation and expanding market opportunities programs.

The budget is a large document and it is of much interest. I can only touch on a piece of it during my speech. We all know that in the lead-up to the budget, there is much speculation. In the case of this year's budget, most of the speculation revolved around pre-election posturing. There was no speculation about new taxes. This is unlike speculation about new revenue sources, also known as tax increases, in previous federal administrations and as we just witnessed, in Alberta and Ontario. Governments in many jurisdictions continue to do exactly the things that got previous governments into trouble. I am very proud to be part of a government that is consistent and reliable, that displays respect for the taxpayer, and that is leading Canada in a direction that is responsible and increasingly is the envy of much of the world.

Canada's economic action plan is working. Our job creation record since the depths of the recession is the best in the G7. Our overall federal tax burden is at its lowest level in more than 50 years. Canada's net debt to GDP ratio is less than half of the G7 average. Since 2006, we have reduced greenhouse gases by almost 6% while growing the economy by 11%.

Former finance minister Jim Flaherty delivered great budgets before, during and after the global recession. His wish was to deliver a balanced budget post-recession, and he almost achieved it last year. Pre-recession, he paid down \$37 billion in debt. Our current finance minister delivered a surplus budget on April 21, with the promise of growing surpluses in succeeding years. At the same time, the budget supports job-creating businesses, contributes to safe and healthy communities, supports families and seniors, and strengthens our security and enhances improvements to meet the needs of veterans.

• (1345)

I would like to talk about the doubling of the tax-free savings account contribution limit to \$10,000. As the member of Parliament for Vancouver Island North and with a brother living and paying taxes in the U.S., I became intrigued by the tax-prepaid Roth, individual retirement accounts that the U.S. introduced in 1998.

Subsequently, I put forward a private member's motion in 2004 to urge the government of the day to initiate a tax-prepaid savings plan in Canada. I had heard that Paul Martin had thought about it. In 2005, at the Conservative national convention in Montreal, I brought my private member's motion as a Vancouver Island North constituency organization-backed resolution, and the party adopted it. This became the rationale for Jim Flaherty making it the centrepiece of the 2008 budget.

There are now 11 million Canadians with tax-free savings accounts, and 60% of tax-free savings account holders who max out their contribution earn less than \$60,000 a year. Over half of those who have these accounts earn less than \$42,000 a year. I am proud to have been part of this development. I do not understand the opposition stating that tax-free savings accounts only benefit the wealthy.

We have had much speculation about the tax-free savings accounts since the budget. I can quote a little from *The Globe and Mail*:

For retirees, the increased limit has placed a greater light on TFSA's being efficient tools to use in tax planning

We have another vehicle that is becoming much more useful with tax-free growth, and we are running the math and seeing that instead of waiting until someone is in their 70's, we should be drawing out smaller amounts of money earlier than we historically would've but at a lower rate of tax over all and then shift it into the TFSA.

For young people buying their first house or condo in their 20s or early 30s, the advice we have been giving if you are in a lower tax bracket is don't even contribute to an RRSP because chances are you will be in a higher bracket when you have to take it out.

Clients also have the added benefit of having a flexible repayment plan...as anything taken out of the TFSA will be added to your contribution room for the following year (unlike the home buyers' plan, which requires investors to start repaying the fund two years after the withdrawal).

This has changed many things in a positive direction.

The Budget

I think I have a minute or two. The ground is shifting on the comprehension and understanding of the federal role in providing funding to the provinces for health care. I can quote from *Maclean's* magazine, Paul Wells, on April 20, and this has to do with health care transfers:

....the Conservatives have kept transfers to the provinces growing at six per cent a year for as long as they've been in office. But after 2017, that rate of growth will fall to somewhere between three per cent and six per cent, depending on how fast the general economy grows.

But something odd has happened. Growth in health spending has slowed right down, as provinces with very different governments decided, all by themselves, to curb this runaway budget line. In 2011-12, health spending grew by 6.2 per cent in British Columbia, six per cent in Alberta and 4.4 per cent in Ontario. This year it will grow by 2.9 per cent in B.C. and 1.8 per cent in Ontario. Alberta will cut health spending every year for the next three, then let it grow again at less than three per cent per year.

•(1350)

As we can see, the federal transfers are greater than what the provinces are currently budgeting. Therefore, what we are providing is leading to less provincial input into health care spending. That is an observation made by anyone who does the math.

I see my time has elapsed. We are moving in the right direction with budget 2015.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I noted my colleague's interest in lowering taxes. One of his colleagues said that he was proud of the government for lowering taxes for more than 2 million Canadians.

However, I must emphasize that Canada has a population of 35 million people. It is all well and good to lower taxes for 2 million people, but what about the other 33 million?

They have infrastructure that has not been modernized, roads that are crumbling, bridges that are falling down, inadequate public transit and hospital services that are harder and harder to obtain.

Can my colleague explain how his budget helps the vast majority of Canadians?

It is great to hear him talk about the people who will benefit from his budget, but as far as I know, we are the government of all Canadians, not just the wealthiest 5%.

[*English*]

Hon. John Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I have a much larger speech that I have been using as my constituency-based speech on the budget. I can talk for 40 minutes on the budget at the drop of a hat. A lot of what I was speaking about is exactly what we are doing in the budget for seniors, for families, for businesses, for communities, for growing the economy and for providing jobs.

One thing that really attracts a lot of attention, particularly from municipal governments, which are the closest government we have to the people, is what we as a government have done consistently with respect to infrastructure throughout the piece. Our infrastructure investments are actually three times what they were under the previous Liberal administration.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we interview people to do a job, we often ask them if they have done the job before. If they do not have that much direct

experience we might ask if they have done something comparable that could build our confidence that they would be able to do the job.

The government tells us that it will have a balanced budget and that it will have a surplus and so on, but what is that claim rooted in? Has the Conservative Party in government ever done that before? I do not think so. Perhaps once under R.B. Bennett during the Great Depression. Therefore, there is very little confidence-building matter here.

In terms of a more recent example, I would just like to talk about the Mulroney government experience. Under the Trudeau government, the annual average deficit was 2.9% of GDP between 1969 and 1980. Under the Mulroney government, the average annual deficit was 6.7% of GDP, and the debt burden rose dramatically under the Conservative government of the day, from 37.5% of GDP in 1983-84 to 66.6% in 1994-95.

Why should Canadians believe that the government will be able to balance the budget and run a surplus when it has not done so for a very long time?

•(1355)

Hon. John Duncan: Mr. Speaker, we have the advantage of having had only two finance ministers in government since 2006. Our first finance minister paid back \$37 billion on the national debt. One does not do that unless one has a balanced budget, so it is obvious that the person who asked the question had not done his homework to even know that we ran surpluses prior to the recession.

Contrary to the member's assertions, under Pierre Trudeau's government, during his 14 years in power, he increased spending by an average of 14% a year for 14 years, completely unsustainable. It changed us from a government that was small and efficient to one that was bloated and inefficient. We have been trying to get back to a decent and responsible place ever since.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We will resume debate, but I will let the hon. member for Whitby—Oshawa know that statements by members will start in a few minutes, so she will have about three minutes to get under way for her 10-minute remarks. The remaining time, of course, will be available to her when the House next resumes debate on the question.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Whitby—Oshawa.

Mrs. Pat Perkins (Whitby—Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the Chief Government Whip, for his comments and sharing his time.

It is an honour and privilege to rise in the House to talk about economic action plan 2015, a budget that provides a low-tax plan and that will continue to provide jobs, growth and security for all Canadians.

Statements by Members

Under the leadership of our Prime Minister, Canadians from coast to coast to coast have seen the creation of over 1.2 million net new, full-time and well-paying private sector jobs since the depths of the great recession. Since being given the clear mandate of responsible spending, job creation and lowering taxes in 2006, our government has delivered on the promise of making life more affordable for all Canadians. Economic action plan 2015 builds on this mandate and ensures that Canadians are the direct recipients of sensible economic measures that will help them save money and improve their everyday lives.

Moreover, this budget also supports the growth and development of job-creating businesses. I am happy to use my time today to outline just a few of the many proposed sensible and effective measures that are going to specifically benefit the lives of all Canadians and businesses while fulfilling our promise of a balanced budget.

This year's budget would build on our low-tax record, with our government proposing measures like the new family tax cut. This tax cut would provide a federal non-refundable tax credit of up to \$2,000 for couples with children under 18 years of age. This budget would also provide enhancements to the universal child care benefit by adding an increased benefit of \$160 per month for children under six years old or a benefit of \$60 a month for children aged six through 17. In fact, when we factor in all of these money-saving measures, this year a two-income family of four would save approximately \$6,600 in taxes. That \$6,600 in savings would stay in the pockets of Canadian families and allow them to use their hard-earned funds on what matters most to them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Whitby—Oshawa will have seven minutes remaining for her remarks when the House next resumes debate on the question.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[Translation]

EASTERN QUEBEC PORT FACILITIES

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, FD): Mr. Speaker, the government issued a simple press release last Friday evening to announce that it was going to divest itself of 25 ports in eastern Quebec. In most cases, this is fundamental infrastructure that is at the heart of the communities' history and economic activity.

The mayors in my region, who lament the fact that the federal government announced this under the radar, are concerned that they do not have all the details they need to properly prepare themselves. They are wondering how the municipalities are going to cover these expenses, when even the federal government is saying that it does not have the means to do so. The threat of privatization or the complete abandonment of these port facilities is also hanging over their heads.

What the mayors are asking for is simple: the government must upgrade these ports and provide the communities the financial support they need to be able to acquire and operate the facilities

instead of making them foot the bill for infrastructure that has been neglected by the federal government.

* * *

• (1400)
[English]

RAILWAY SAFETY WEEK

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week is Railway Safety Week. Every year in Canada, approximately 300 collisions occur at railway crossings. Virtually all of these could be avoided. The goal of Railway Safety Week is to give awareness to Canadians in order to prevent collisions between trains and motor vehicles.

Rail safety is of the utmost importance to me. Ensuring that our families and our communities remain safe is something for which I passionately advocate. In fact, my private member's bill, Bill C-627, an act to amend the Railway Safety Act (safety of persons and property), which has recently passed the committee stage, seeks to give additional powers to the Minister of Transport and railway safety inspectors so they may intervene when required in order to better ensure the safety of citizens, property and communities.

I am confident the bill will make a positive change, and I encourage all Canadians to become involved and promote rail safety. One injury or fatality is one too many.

* * *

RAILWAY SAFETY

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, people in my riding of York South—Weston are still concerned about rail safety. Since the tragedy at Lac-Mégantic in 2013, little has changed, while the volume of explosive crude oil transported through Weston, Mount Dennis and the Junction neighbourhoods has continued to grow.

The Auditor General and the Transportation Safety Board have both scolded Transport Canada for its lack of attention to rail safety, while the government cut its budget.

This winter's oil train wrecks in northern Ontario add to the growing list of wrecks all over North America. The resulting fireballs are from the newer, supposedly safer 1232 tankers. They were travelling at speeds much lower than the minister's new limit and they still burst into flames.

The attitude of the government, that we should just pray that train wrecks do not happen in a populated area, is not calming the fears of the residents of York South—Weston or anywhere.

A Toronto group of hard working volunteers called, Safe Rail Communities, has taken up the cause, and will be testifying before the transportation committee this afternoon. Let us hope the government is listening.

* * *

WORLD IMMUNIZATION WEEK

Hon. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, I was honoured to welcome the Minister of Veterans Affairs to my beautiful riding of Kelowna—Lake Country.

Statements by Members

As Rotarians, the minister and I started our day off at the Kelowna Sunrise Rotary Club, one of the many clubs across Canada that partner with government to make life better for people locally and globally. One of those steadfast partners is the Canadian government, which has been, and remains, a global leader with Rotary International and the Global Polio Eradication Initiative.

April 24 to 30 is World Immunization Week and Rotary International is calling on all countries to “Close the Immunization Gap”.

It takes less than a dollar to vaccinate a child against polio. Although the world is 99% of the way there, one in five children still misses out. In 2013, an estimated 21.8 million infants did not receive lifesaving vaccines.

We have a narrow window of opportunity to close the gap. I encourage all members in the House and everyone to support their local rotary clubs and Rotary International and help reach the goal to end polio now.

* * *

CHRISTINE STEWART

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate a life of service. Christine Stewart passed away last Saturday. She dedicated her life to her family and to social service, as a nurse, school board trustee, tireless volunteer involved in charities, arts bodies, international development, co-founder of NGOs whose names are, as such, a reflection of her whole life: “Horizons of Friendship” and “Northumberland Fare Share Food Bank”.

She invested her passion as a Liberal MP for the riding of Northumberland, which she proudly represented from 1988 to 2000.

As secretary of state, she improved Canadian involvement in Latin America and Africa. As minister of the environment, Christine Stewart negotiated and signed the Kyoto protocol, improved the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, the Species at Risk Act and the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act.

After leaving politics, Christine never stopped her life of service. She will be deeply missed.

* * *

• (1405)

TAXATION

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government believes that parents know what is best for their children. That is why we are increasing the child care expense deduction to \$8,000, increasing the universal child care benefit to \$1,920 annually for children under age 6, and expanding it to \$720 annually for children aged 6 to 17.

Policy is much more than numbers on paper. The right policy has an important human dimension, as I learned from one of my constituents. Ms. Mackenzie Danard, from Swan River, Manitoba, wrote me a letter to say, “This helps a lot for single parents. Thank you for helping us raise our children”.

Our government is delivering support directly to families like Mackenzie's. The Liberals and the New Democrats want to take that money away from Mackenzie and families like hers. That is shameful.

* * *

[Translation]

AIR FORCE APPRECIATION DAY

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today is Air Force Appreciation Day. This is an important day for me as the Bagotville military base is in my riding. I constantly see what a great contribution air force members and their families make to communities across Canada.

During my term in office, I have had the pleasure of forging strong ties with senior air force officials, officers at Bagotville, members of the air force and civilian personnel who support our military members.

I would first like to thank the commander of the Royal Canadian Air Force, Lieutenant-General Yvan Blondin. In addition to the remarkable work he has done in every position he has held, he has played a crucial role in ensuring that the mental health issues of our forces are no longer as taboo as they were in the past.

It has also been an honour to regularly meet with Colonels Paul Prévost, Sylvain Ménard and Érick Simoneau and to see how they support members of the forces and their families through difficult times and also how they serve the community where they are based.

I have such an appreciation for so many officers and members of the air force in Bagotville that I cannot name them all. Please know that I am proud of your efforts and proud to represent you in Ottawa.

* * *

[English]

AIR FORCE APPRECIATION DAY

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is Air Force Appreciation Day on Parliament Hill, and I am pleased to honour my constituent, retired Chief Warrant Officer Reginald Daws.

Reg joined the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1955 and served with distinction during his 36-year career in postings across Canada, including at the Canadian Forces School of Military Engineering in Chilliwack. He has been a member of the RCAF Association for over 20 years. Reg never misses a ceremony at our local cenotaph, and he has been instrumental in preserving the memory of the fallen, particularly with our youth.

Statements by Members

For his leadership abilities, people skills and dedication, he received the Distinguished Service Award in 2013. Today, Reg will be honoured with the Len Baldock Memorial Award, which recognizes skill, enthusiasm, direction and leadership in association activities above the ordinary.

I invite all members to join with me to congratulate Reginald Daws and salute all Canadian Air Force personnel, past and present, for their outstanding service to Canada.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my constituents of Red Deer know that it is only our Conservative government that will lower taxes for the middle class.

Middle-class families in my riding are looking forward to receiving the benefits from the family tax cut and the enhanced universal child care benefit. These benefits will leave 100% of families with kids with more money in their pockets.

The Liberals and the NDP would take this away and raise taxes on middle-class families, raise taxes on middle-class seniors and raise taxes on middle-class consumers. That is their plan for the middle class.

Our government's plan is for reducing taxes for the middle class.

* * *

NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, in Hamilton and in communities across Canada, workers are marking the National Day of Mourning for workers injured and killed on the job, and those who have become ill because of their workplace.

The National Day of Mourning is not only a time of reflection and remembrance, it is also a day to rededicate ourselves to the goal of keeping workers safe at their jobs. Every day, four workers die on the job and each year another one million are injured. Such statistics are clearly unacceptable, but equally staggering is the fact that one in seven young workers is injured on the job. These are our sons, daughters, brothers and sisters.

Canadian workers lose their lives because workplace safety is thrown out of the window in the interest of the bottom line. When workers are killed, it is far too often because they have been pressured into doing unsafe work.

I would close with one of the labour movement's most important mottos: an injury to one is an injury to all.

* * *

● (1410)

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, residents of my riding and across all of British Columbia are concerned about the crime epidemic in Surrey. That is why our Conservative government has taken strong action to increase front-line RCMP officers in our communities. We have passed more than

30 new measures to combat crime and we have made the youth gang prevention fund a permanent program.

Unfortunately, the Liberals and the New Democrats have opposed and obstructed us every step of the way. The Liberals' solution to drug-fuelled gang warfare is to make marijuana easier for all children to buy and smoke.

British Columbians know that it is only the Prime Minister and this Conservative government who can be trusted to protect them from violent crime.

* * *

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise in solidarity with working Canadians who gather in places like Kapuskasing, Elliot Lake and AOK First Nation because no one deserves to die at work, which is what happens to an average of four people in our country every day.

Workers die from traumatic injuries sustained on the job, occupational diseases and even violence in the workplace. That does not include individuals who die from work-related conditions and diseases that go unreported.

While the number of workplace-related deaths has grown in Canada, other OECD countries have seen their numbers go down. Canada has laws for criminal responsibility in some cases of occupational death, but they are so rarely applied that there is no incentive for employers to address dangerous working conditions. We are trading the safety of our workplace for profits. However, for families who have lost loved ones, there is no amount that can provide comfort.

While so many workers needlessly lose their lives year after year, we have to ask ourselves: How many men, women and teenagers have to die before governments finally take action?

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week the Minister of Finance tabled a balanced budget in this House. Now that we have balanced our budget, we would help hard-working Canadian families balance theirs through our new family tax cut and enhanced universal child care benefit. These measures would benefit 100% of families with children, leaving every family with more money in its pocket to spend on its priorities.

Sadly, the Liberals and the the New Democrats have a different plan, and it is a simple one. They want higher taxes on middle-class families, higher taxes on middle-class seniors and higher taxes on middle-class consumers so those parties can afford their plans to expand their control on the finances of Canadian families. They philosophically believe that government is better suited to handle the finances of Canadian families than the hard-working people of Canada.

That is the wrong plan for hard-working Canadian families. That is why our Conservative government is reducing taxes on the middle class.

*Statements by Members***THE ECONOMY**

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government's top priority is creating jobs, growth and long-term prosperity. Our plan is working.

Since the depths of the global economic downturn, over 1.2 million net new jobs have been created, overwhelmingly full-time, well paying and in the private sector. Indeed, Canada has had one of the best job creation records in the G7 over the recovery.

Economic action plan 2015 builds on the government's plan for jobs and growth by supporting the manufacturing sector, helping small business and entrepreneurs, training a highly skilled workforce, investing in infrastructure, growing trade and expanding markets. The list goes on.

My constituents in Richmond Hill and, indeed, all Canadians know that our government is the only one they can trust to cut taxes and put money back in their pockets. They cannot afford the Liberal and the NDP plan that would raise taxes on middle-class families, on middle-class seniors, on middle-class consumers and on small businesses.

* * *

NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the entire Liberal caucus, I wish to extend my deepest sympathies to all families who have been affected by death or injury in the workplace. Their sacrifice and that of all their families must serve as a lesson to us all.

The National Day of Mourning is held on April 28 every year to remember those who have suffered and died on the job, and to renew our efforts for safe workplaces. Today, there is pronounced sadness and, at the same time, frustration that needless injuries and deaths can continue to occur as a result of not enacting the right law or not doing a good enough job enforcing the laws that exist.

The April 28 monuments are often inscribed with the words "Fight for the Living, Mourn for the Dead". Today is the day we honour the dead, but also a day to remind us that, as parliamentarians, we have a never-ending obligation to make workplaces safer by enacting and enforcing laws that prevent workplace injury, illness and death.

* * *

• (1415)

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we commemorate the National Day of Mourning.

Statistics show that today, three people—fathers and mothers—will go to work and will not return home. In 2013, 902 people died on the job, thousands of others were involved in workplace accidents, and even more people developed occupational illnesses. These statistics are alarming and disturbing. Lives and families are ruined.

That is why, on this National Day of Mourning, we pay tribute to these workers and we reiterate our commitment to protecting each and every one of them. The NDP is committed to improving workplace safety and to reducing the number of accidents.

On this day of remembrance, and each and every day, we will fight to ensure that every worker has the right to safe working conditions. We will not forget them. No one should lose their life while trying to earn a living.

* * *

[*English*]

NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to mark the National Day of Mourning and pay tribute to those who have been killed, injured, or suffered illness as a result of work-related incidents.

One of the best ways we can recognize those who have been affected by these incidents is to do everything in our power to protect Canadians from workplace hazards and prevent further accidents, illnesses, and deaths. Although there has been a decrease in fatalities from the previous year, one fatality is one too many.

Our government works with our partners and stakeholders to educate employees about their health and safety rights, responsibilities, and preventive measures. We develop and share tools and best practices with employers and workers to help them make informed decisions on how best to ensure workplace safety.

All Canadians deserve to return home safe and sound every day.

* * *

NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING

The Speaker: Following discussions among representatives of all parties in the House, I understand that there is an agreement to observe a moment of silence to commemorate the National Day of Mourning and to honour the memory of workers killed or injured at work.

[*Translation*]

I invite hon. members to rise.

[*A moment of silence observed.*]

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[Translation]***THE BUDGET**

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, the Auditor General confirmed that the Conservatives are really bad managers. In fact, the Minister of Finance does not even evaluate the tax measures he puts in place. Those measures are just electoral goodies for the Conservative voter base, period. The Conservatives have no idea how much these measures will cost and they do not analyze the results. The finance minister said again this week that he does not even know whether the measures will create jobs.

Why is the Prime Minister insisting on giving gifts to the wealthiest Canadians when the Auditor General has once again proven that the Conservatives do not even know what they are doing?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not what the Auditor General said. He said that he found that Finance Canada does a good job of analyzing new tax measures and monitoring existing ones.

[English]

The Auditor General has asked for an additional two years of data to be published in addition to the two years we have already published. That is a recommendation we will accept.

What we do not accept is the premise of the NDP that somehow giving people more of their own money is taking something away from Canadians. This is people's own money. We want to make sure more of it stays in their pockets and creates jobs and economic growth.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the problem is that 85% of Canadians do not benefit from it. He is taking from the poor to give to the rich.

The Auditor General just slammed the Conservatives for failing to be transparent with Canadians about billions of dollars in tax giveaways. Conservatives have introduced dozens of loopholes and boutique tax credits that help the wealthiest few, but they refuse to give even basic information about precisely who benefits and how much the giveaways cost.

Does the Prime Minister really think he can hide the cost of his gifts to the wealthy few? Who does he think he is, Paul Martin?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously I am not. If I were Paul Martin, the NDP would be supporting me.

The Auditor General actually said he found that Finance Canada does a good job of analyzing new tax measures and monitoring existing ones. He has asked for an additional two years of data in addition to the two years we already publish and, of course, Finance Canada has accepted that recommendation.

What we will not accept is the NDP wanting to take away tax-free savings accounts and wanting to take away universal child care benefits. These are for all Canadians.

ETHICS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, he is right. Paul Martin would put up the same program as he. The only problem is that, after 150 years of Conservative and Liberal incompetence, Canadians deserve real change.

The last time we were in the House, the Prime Minister claimed that, before he appointed Mike Duffy to the Senate, Duffy signed a declaration swearing that he was a resident of P.E.I. The only problem is that there is nothing in that declaration about that. So here is the problem: The Prime Minister says Duffy signed it before being named; it is not true. Can the Prime Minister please tell Canadians which declaration he was referring us to, and when exactly did Mike Duffy sign it?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just to reply to that earlier comment by the leader of the NDP, when it comes to what we have done to give 11 million Canadians tax-free savings accounts, to increase the guaranteed income supplement, to create the universal child care benefit, to allow income-splitting for seniors and for families, and to give a 2% tax cut to the GST, I know that the NDP wants to take those things away, but that is not the kind of change Canadians are looking for.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Mike who? It is Mike Duffy. Mike Duffy is not the only longtime Ottawa resident that the Prime Minister appointed to represent Atlantic Canada. Carolyn Stewart Olsen not only lived in Ottawa; she worked side-by-side with the Prime Minister day in and day out as his press secretary. She was his communications director and, frankly, his closest political confidant. Therefore how is it possible that the Prime Minister thought Carolyn Stewart Olsen actually lived in New Brunswick, when she was showing up to work for him here in Ottawa every single day?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly would not accept by any means the premise of that question. What I would say is what is very clear, that Mr. Duffy's actions are before the court. The government has been assisting the RCMP in its investigation and the Crown in its presentation of the case. Those matters are before the court. We will let the court adjudicate those matters.

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Liberal and Conservative senators are trying to block the internal audit report regarding their places of residence.

Senators do not want Canadians to know what they found out about their own colleagues. They are protecting each other, and the Prime Minister is playing along. There is a Conservative majority in the Senate.

Where is the internal audit report?

• (1425)

[English]

Will the Prime Minister stand up and demand that his Conservative senators, who are his caucus colleagues, make this report public?

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition knows full well that that is a Senate matter. It is not a House or government matter. Mr. Duffy's case is now before the courts, and we are going to let them do their job.

* * *

*[English]***GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING**

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians watching the hockey playoffs are being bombarded with millions of dollars of wasteful, partisan government ads for which they are paying. As we have seen time and time again, the Conservative government has the wrong priorities, and here is another example.

Why is the Prime Minister spending more than twice as much on budget ads as he is on young entrepreneurs?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was delighted to see the support of Futurpreneur Canada for the budget. I would urge the hon. leader of the Liberal Party to listen to it.

The reality, of course, is that the things we are doing for Canadians, such as the tax benefits that go to seniors and to families, are very good for all Canadians. We want to be sure that all Canadians benefit.

I know that the Liberal Party is opposed to these things and wants to take them away, but the reality is that these are benefits available to Canadians, and we want to make sure Canadians get them.

[Translation]

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government is about to waste millions more taxpayer dollars on advertising in praise of its latest budget. Public money should serve the people's interests, not the Conservative Party's interests.

Can the Prime Minister explain why he is spending \$17 million of our money on partisan advertising when he could have created 5,000 more jobs for our young people this summer?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's economic action plan provides many benefits to middle-class consumers, families, seniors and women, as well as to small and medium-sized businesses.

I am well aware that the Liberal Party despises benefits and tax cuts for the middle class, but those benefits are available, and we want to make sure people can get them.

[English]

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, these are the answers of an out of touch, decade-old government. It is hard to imagine the Prime Minister supporting these measures back in 2006. He has changed.

Why is he spending \$17 million on budget ads this year? Why not invest that into the Canada summer jobs program and put 5,000 young people to work this summer, as they want to do?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is a party, the Liberal Party, that has opposed tax-free savings accounts for ordinary Canadians. The Liberal Party has opposed the increase in the guaranteed income supplement for Canadians. It is a party that has opposed the universal child care benefit, income splitting for seniors and for families, and other tax credits for Canadian families. We know who is out of touch.

On this side of the House, we are helping families, seniors, and the middle class, and they can keep voting against them all they want.

* * *

*[Translation]***NEPAL**

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we watch helplessly as the death toll in Nepal rises by the hour. Everyone needs help immediately, including our fellow citizens who are stuck there.

Apparently Canadians there are getting better service from the American and French governments than from our own.

Why is Canada not working with those countries and our other partners to coordinate help for Canadians in Nepal?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is certainly not the case. First of all, there has never been a Canadian embassy in Nepal. That being said, we already have eight additional staff members on the ground, who arrived yesterday, and there are six more on their way. We are working with our allies, other countries.

I can indicate to the hon. member that every single effort will be made to assist Canadians in that part of the world.

• (1430)

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, of course, our deepest condolences go to the people of Nepal as they deal with the devastation of this earthquake, but Canadians stranded in Nepal need help too. They want to return to Canada. They are being told that the Canadian transport plane will take them back to New Delhi, and they will be left, at that point, to find flights home on their own.

Will the government provide Canadians evacuated to neighbouring countries with the further emergency consular assistance they need until they can return home?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the C-17 Globemaster, which has already been deployed, will be available to evacuate Canadians from Kathmandu. That is the first priority.

I can tell the member as well that a second C-17 will be made available in the coming days to get Canadians, again, out of Nepal.

Oral Questions

That being said, a consular service has been established at the American Club in central Kathmandu and will make every effort to assist Canadians.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first nations have worse health outcomes than other Canadians, yet the current Conservative government has shown total disregard for this fact.

The Auditor General revealed this morning that first nations in remote communities are being forced to seek health care from substandard clinics with undertrained staff. The government is not even trying to allocate services based on need or to make sure that first nations have the same care as other Canadians.

The question is, why does the current government think it is okay to treat first nations in a substandard way?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is actually not what the Auditor General said, but I do thank him for the work he did, and I had a chance to meet with him to describe the comprehensive nature of the responses to his audit.

It is important that Canadians know that we have actually increased funding on first nations for health by 31%, and our number one priority is making sure that aboriginal Canadians have access to health care providers. Nurses on first nations are highly educated and qualified individuals, and they are a big part of the community. We are increasing our efforts so that nurses meet public service requirements, but we are also encouraging more practitioners to work in remote first nations by having Canada student loan forgiveness for doctors and nurses. We have also launched a nurse recruitment and retention strategy, and I am pleased to say that we have had over 250 applications since February. We are well on our way to addressing all of the issues the Auditor General—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksasing.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this government's record is simply indefensible.

The Auditor General made it clear that first nations in remote communities have no choice but to seek care in substandard clinics from nurses who lack training.

One of those communities did not get a visit from a health specialist for two years because of a septic system failure that was never repaired. Two years. That is crazy.

Why are the Conservatives abandoning remote communities?

[*English*]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me just explain to the member how access to health care providers on remote first nations works.

First of all, we have over 734 aboriginal health facilities on first nations. We are investing over \$30 million toward the maintenance of these facilities, and we are constantly working with first nations to ensure that they are maintained. In fact, we have built five brand new facilities in the last three years. We also have Telehealth available. If

any first nation aboriginal cannot get access to the health care they need, we are willing, of course, and always have the opportunity, to use emergency medical evacuation at no cost to the first nation.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is another thing we have learned from the Auditor General's report: last year, 1,500 offenders were released directly into communities in Canada without any rehabilitation. Not only are offenders entitled to rehabilitation, but we all know how beneficial social reintegration is for public safety.

Will the minister listen to the repeated recommendations made by the Auditor General and the Correctional Investigator and prioritize the effective, safe reintegration of offenders into our society?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that we welcome the Auditor General's recommendations and we share his point of view.

Our government has established truth in sentencing measures, which means that offenders serve their sentences behind bars, and that keeps Canadians safe. While they are serving their sentences, offenders can access more rehabilitation programs than in the past. Nearly 95% of offenders have access to such programs.

We will continue to make the safety of our communities a priority.

* * *

• (1435)

[*English*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today's Auditor General's report on the National Defence ombudsman is extremely troubling. The report reveals serious mismanagement and ethical breaches within the office. According to the Auditor General, the defence department knew about many of these problems but failed to fully investigate.

Oral Questions

The ombudsman's office is a vital resource for soldiers and their families to get redress. Can the Minister of National Defence explain why his department allowed this toxic work environment to exist, and will he commit to proper monitoring of the ombudsman's office to ensure that this cannot happen again?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of National Defence and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all of these oversight bodies, like ombudsmen, operate in a quasi-independent fashion, but I want to thank the Auditor General for getting to the bottom of this completely unacceptable abuse of both public servants and tax dollars. We accept all of his recommendations without reservation. Specific measures are already being taken, including a new agreement to better manage employees and processes for better financial accountability.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a new report confirms yet again that fewer and fewer unemployed workers are getting employment insurance when they need it.

The Conservative budget took billions of dollars from the employment insurance fund, which, let us not forget, is funded solely by employees and employers. Why did the government raid the fund? It did so in order to offer income splitting to the wealthiest Canadians and allow them to shelter more money in their TFSAs.

Here is the real question: Why are the Conservatives using employment insurance contributions to fatten the wallets of the wealthiest Canadians instead of helping the 1.3 million unemployed Canadians?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the facts in the hon. member's question are absolutely false.

Our policy, as described in the budget, seeks to balance the employment insurance account in the medium term: there was a deficit in the account during the recession and now we are paying down that deficit. What is more, in two years, we are going to reduce the contributions by 21%, which will create jobs for the employees and leave more money in their pockets.

[English]

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians who lose their jobs through no fault of their own expect the EI system to help, because that is what it is supposed to do, but even with so many Canadians out of work, 1.3 million at last count, access to EI benefits is at historic lows. Two-thirds of unemployed Canadians are denied support.

When so many are struggling to make ends meet, how can the Conservatives justify giving handouts to the wealthy few ahead of helping those who really need it?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member's statement is absolutely false.

The policy laid out in the budget is for the employment insurance account to balance over the medium term. It was in a deficit during

the recession. That money is now being paid back. We are cutting employment insurance premiums for both employees and employers by 21% in 2017. That will create jobs by making it less expensive to hire and will leave more money in the pockets of people who work.

The NDP and Liberals want to spend billions on a 45-day work year, where people would only work 45 days, and then they would be on EI for the rest of the year. That would cost billions and kill jobs. That is why we reject it.

* * *

FINANCE

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a 45-day work year sounds like the Minister of Finance.

The Prime Minister once lectured the UN, saying, “You can’t manage what you can’t measure”.

That could have actually been the title of the Auditor General's report that said that the Conservatives are failing on drug safety, failing on first nations health care, and failing even to measure the cost to taxpayers of billions of dollars in tax handouts.

Now I understand why, after the bad week the Minister of Finance had, he has been benched. Is there anybody over there willing to take some responsibility for the mess they are making, or are they leaving that to future generations to clean up?

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me remind the hon. member what the Auditor General said:

We found that Finance Canada does a good job of analyzing new tax measures and of monitoring existing ones.

I remind the member that those tax measures are measures like income-splitting for families, pension income-splitting for seniors. Those are tax measures that are putting money back into the pockets of Canadians.

We know that the New Democratic Party would tax middle-class Canadians. It would tax middle-class seniors. We are not going to let that happen. Canadians know they are better off with this Conservative government.

Oral Questions

●(1440)

TOURISM

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has spent nearly three-quarters of a billion dollars on partisan ads, yet last week's budget included no new money to help promote Canada as a tourism destination in the U.S. Instead, after years of cuts and neglect, the budget included only a vague commitment to consult with important stakeholders.

Hundreds of thousands of middle-class Canadians depend on our tourism industry, yet the government still has no plan. Can the minister tell the House how much money he has set aside to promote Canada in the U.S., or does Canada's action plan only include partisan advertising?

Hon. Ed Holder (Minister of State (Science and Technology), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member opposite for his question, and I would like to welcome him back to the House.

Appreciating that he has just recently returned, there are a few things I would like to bring to his attention and to the members opposite.

Our government is extremely proud of the concrete actions it has taken to support Canada's tourism industry. In fact, he might be interested in knowing that the investments we are making in the Canadian Tourism Commission are paying off. Since last January 2014, overnight trips to Canada have increased 10.8% over last year. Where is that coming from? That is coming from the United States. Budget 2015 proposes additional support to the CTC to embark on a new marketing program in the United States, in partnership with the tourism industry.

* * *

PENSIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister should not be proud. He should be embarrassed. Quite frankly, we spend hundreds of millions of tax dollars on partisan advertising, totalling three-quarters of a billion dollars. This is something the Prime Minister needs to kind of get his head around. That is a phenomenal amount of advertising.

Let me ask the Prime Minister this: How much advertising has been done to advertise the fact that the Conservative government has increased the age of retirement from 65 to 67? That is going to affect millions of Canadians.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after the Liberal ad scam, that party has no credibility talking about government advertising.

We are advertising the family tax cut, which will save up to \$2,000 through income splitting. We are advertising the Prime Minister's increased universal child care benefit, which pays almost \$2,000 for kids under six and \$720 for kids six through 17.

Here is the difference: Liberals use government advertising to give money to themselves; we use government advertising to give money back to Canadian taxpayers.

FINANCE

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Bank of Canada says housing prices are overvalued by up to 30%. The bank cites elevated risks of a housing correction in Alberta, Toronto, and Vancouver and warns that if that happened in these markets simultaneously, "the spillover effects to the rest of the economy could be significant". These are serious risks facing our economy and housing markets. That is why the government was advised to increase the contingency reserve.

Why did the Conservatives actually ignore that advice and raid the reserve? Was it just to cobble up an illusory surplus on the eve of an election?

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, in recent years the government has taken action to ensure long-term stability of the housing market and to reduce taxpayers' exposure. These actions have helped ensure that Canada's housing market remains relatively strong. We will continue to monitor the housing market closely.

Our government is lowering taxes for taxpayers. We are providing benefits directly to families and are creating jobs for families to make sure they can make ends meet. We are doing all we can to keep money in the pockets of Canadians. We know that party would take that away from Canadians.

* * *

●(1445)

[Translation]

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government's complacency when it comes to aviation safety is troubling.

The Transportation Safety Board of Canada report released yesterday is very clear: the current approach to oversight is not enough to address unsafe practices and conditions. If Transport Canada does not adopt an approach that combines audits and inspections, the risk of accidents may increase.

The government has cut the transportation safety budget by more than 20%. When is it going to take Canadians' safety seriously?

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all we want to thank the Transportation Safety Board for its report wherein it found that the Buffalo Airways airline was found to not be following the rules. We find this to be absolutely unacceptable.

Safety management systems are internationally known as the gold standard. That is what we employ here in Canada. In 2012, Transport Canada developed a civil aviation action plan to ensure that oversight was as robust as needed for its mandate. We will continue to monitor the implementation of these changes that Transport Canada is bringing about, and we will not hesitate to use every tool that we have in order to ensure that Transport Canada is carrying out the mandate.

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is another troubling TSB report on the government's failure on air safety. The report is clear that the current approach to oversight is at risk of failing to address unsafe practices and conditions, and that if Transport Canada does not adopt a balanced approach that combines inspections with audits the risk of accidents may increase.

When will the minister stop cutting transport safety and start ensuring the safety of Canadians?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I previously mentioned in the answer before, in 2002 the department created a civil aviation action plan in order to respond to the critique of the report of the Auditor General that spring.

We are monitoring the carrying out and implementation of this action plan. There is also parliamentary committee oversight. As I stated already, we will use every tool we have to ensure that Transport Canada is fulfilling its mandate with respect to oversight of civil aviation.

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ETHICS

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the man the Prime Minister chose as his parliamentary secretary, his spokesperson on ethics, is now facing possible jail time after violating the Elections Act, yet at every step, despite all of the accusations, the charges, and the investigation, the Prime Minister staunchly defended him.

Why did the Prime Minister insist on Del Mastro's innocence, or was this just the standard Conservative practice of denying everything—

The Speaker: Order, please. I think we may have strayed away from government business on this particular question.

The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, good governance starts with obeying the law. That is why the question is pertinent.

Election fraud is a direct attack on our democracy because it takes away the people's choice of government. Unfortunately, such fraud lies at the very heart of this Prime Minister's administration.

Today, the former parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister is facing serious charges. After the in and out scandal, after the robocalls, after the expenses of another Conservative minister, are the Conservatives going to respect Canadians and—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Wetaskiwin.

Oral Questions

[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know Canadians cannot afford the reckless plans of the NDP and the Liberals. We know the NDP and Liberals would hike taxes on middle-class families, middle-class consumers, and middle-class businesses. Whether they want to purchase a new home or car, start a new business or save for their retirement, Canadians have many reasons to save at every stage of life. Can the Minister of State for Finance tell this House what the Conservative government is doing to help Canadians save for their own priorities?

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is why our Conservative government introduced the tax-free savings account. Nearly 11 million Canadians have opened a tax-free savings account. Of those who have maximized their tax-free savings account, 60% earn under \$60,000 a year. Budget 2015, provides Canadians with a greater opportunity to save on a tax-free basis. We know that the Liberals and the New Democrats would take that away and raise taxes. We will not let that happen.

* * *

● (1450)

[Translation]

HEALTH

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it has become a habit for the Conservatives. They deliberately refuse to keep their promises.

In the case of thalidomide victims, they do not have the right to create false hope. As a result of an NDP motion, the House unanimously voted to provide financial compensation. However, five months later there is nothing in the budget. Not only is Health Canada not releasing its assistance plan to the public, but it is even refusing to provide the details to thalidomide victims.

When will the minister finally treat these victims with dignity?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are working closely with TVAC, the organization. It was always our understanding after we announced the historic assistance to cover the survivors' needs that we would be working with the organization on the tax-free, ongoing yearly support. We have already, obviously, and as identified by the organization, given a cheque of \$125,000 to every individual in TVAC so that they can deal with any urgent needs immediately.

Oral Questions

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government's behaviour is simply inexcusable. Five months after the House voted unanimously to provide thalidomide survivors with full support the Conservatives have offered them nothing but half measures and broken promises. Survivors need financial certainty now. They deserve to know now that their needs will be met, but the government is flatly refusing to answer their questions and there is no sign of the annual compensation the government promised.

Why are the Conservatives failing to keep their promise? Will the minister announce today that she will fully implement the program approved by all of us in the House?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we announced historic assistance to cover survivors' needs and that includes up to \$180 million that will be distributed throughout the survivors, until every last living survivor is taken care of. We have already given each survivor \$125,000 tax-free cash. They received that payment already to get them through the next year. We also have \$168 million tax-free, ongoing yearly support, and in addition, the extraordinary medical assistance fund.

Right now, Health Canada is working out the particular issues around dealing with a third party administrator and working out details of the yearly compensation.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a lot of talk, but no action.

The Vancouver oil spill was a wake-up call, and it is not just Canadians who are ringing the alarm bell. Newly released documents show that U.S. officials are worried. A briefing note for Washington state's governor said Canada's oil spill response is probably a couple of decades behind the system in place in Washington state and that our weaker standards could cost Washington alone billions of dollars in harm.

Will the Conservatives stop making excuses and start protecting our coasts?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, we are pursuing the most ambitious trade agenda that Canada has ever seen. However, we are also taking it very seriously that in order to deliver our goods to the world we have to make sure that we are ready for the increase in traffic. That is why we have embarked upon a world-class tanker safety system. We have made significant investments. We have worked with many partners in British Columbia to deliver on these promises.

These are actions. These are real, and that is very contrary to what the party over there does, making empty promises it can never deliver on.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, they closed the Kitsilano Coast Guard station. What is the minister talking about when she tells us that they made investments?

They say that we have a world-class oil spill response system. They forgot to give us the year, 1970. Let us try to get something that corresponds to 2015.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the animation from the opposite side of the House. However, the reality is this. We have increased Coast Guard funding by 27%. That is one thing this government has done.

I can also indicate that we are ensuring that there is enough money to pay in a polluter pay principle to ensure that spills can be dealt with in an effective manner.

We have expanded the national aerial surveillance program by 55% to ensure that we have a watchful eye on tankers moving through Canadian waters. We are adopting area response plans. These are real things, not the fantasies of the NDP.

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● (1455)

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today the Auditor General outlined the government's total failure to provide access to quality health care for first nations. According to the Auditor General, nursing stations in first nations communities are in poor repair and are chronically understaffed. The health care workers lack the very training mandated by Health Canada to work in these communities. The government has known many of these issues since 2010 and done nothing. Why?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I had a chance to meet with the Auditor General to assure him that we are working on every single issue that he has raised in his report. Our number one priority is to make sure that aboriginal people on first nations have access to health care providers. That is where our nurses come in. Nurses on first nations are all highly educated, qualified individuals, and a big part of the community. We are working to make sure that they are all trained with the additional credentials that they may need to work out of scope in terms of their scope of practice.

In addition, we need to encourage more people to come to work on first nations. We have our Canada student loan forgiveness and we have a new nurse recruitment strategy.

*Oral Questions***CORRECTIONAL SERVICE OF CANADA**

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General today revealed that the Conservatives are releasing hundreds of inmates from prisons directly into the community, before rehabilitation and safe integration programs are even completed. The AG said that 1,500 offenders were released directly into the community from medium and maximum security prisons last year without the full benefit of a gradual re-entry program into society or proper supervision.

I ask the Conservatives: why are they gutting programs that ensure the safety of Canadian communities?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this question is coming from a party that did not want to cut the old age security for inmates.

Let me reassure the member that we agree with the Auditor General that “if you do the crime, you do the time”. I am pleased that the Auditor General found that our truth in sentencing measures have worked, because more prisoners are staying behind bars for a greater portion of their sentence, where they can have rehabilitation and where we can make sure that our communities are safer.

We will make sure that Correctional Services Canada has accepted the recommendation of the Auditor General and are working to address some issues raised by the Auditor General. However, let us be sure that we will keep our communities safer.

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CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, they have done it again. The minister of the Canada Revenue Agency has managed to fail at one of the most basic functions of government. This time, the CRA managed to create mass confusion about when the tax filing deadline actually is and now, for the second year in a row, has been forced to extend the filing deadline.

Will the minister explain how this latest failure occurred, and take some responsibility for the sorry state of affairs at the CRA?

Hon. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, due to a CRA error, an incorrect notification was sent around to tax preparers on Friday, indicating that the CRA filing deadline is May 5.

Our government has made it clear that providing this incorrect information was unacceptable. Therefore, I have directed my officials to ensure that no Canadians are penalized for the CRA's error. Canadians who file their taxes before May 5 will not face any penalties.

Our government remains committed to ensuring a fair tax system for all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians no longer know what to make of this agency.

The Canada Revenue Agency has dropped the ball so many times that it should be awarded the Jerry Lewis prize. First, it lost personal data and sent envelopes chock full of personal information to the

wrong people. Now a press release has spawned total confusion among taxpayers by mistakenly extending the deadline for filing tax returns.

My question is simple: is anyone at the controls?

[*English*]

Hon. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, our priority is to ensure that Canadians are not negatively affected by the unacceptable, incorrect information sent out by the CRA. As such, I have directed my officials to ensure that Canadians will have until May 5 to file their taxes. This is what Canadians would expect.

Our government will not tolerate Canadians paying a price for a CRA mistake. That is why these actions have been taken in the interest of fairness to all taxpayers.

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● (1500)

NEPAL

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the loss of life that has occurred in Nepal and the surrounding region is devastating. This government has acted swiftly, deploying additional consular staff and pledging \$5 million in humanitarian aid.

Can the Minister of National Defence update the House on further resources deployed in response to this disaster?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of National Defence and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to indicate to the House that the Canadian Armed Forces dispatched on Sunday a C-17 Globemaster with some 40 personnel and an enormous amount of equipment, including an ambulance, rescue equipment, humanitarian supplies, tents, et cetera, to Kathmandu. We hope that it will be arriving tomorrow, Canadian time.

Earlier today, we dispatched a second Royal Canadian Air Force C-17 bound for Nepal. Both of these airplanes will be available to help bring Canadians out of Nepal and back into New Delhi.

Canadians are acting, and I want to thank the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, many Canadians are stuck in Nepal, where they are exposed to significant risks.

Denis Prud'homme, a Canadian tourist in Kathmandu, said, “The American embassy is doing an excellent job, but we haven't heard anything from our fine government...We aren't doing very well on the world stage when it comes to helping to Canadian nationals caught in disasters.”

The minister can say whatever he wants, but frankly, the government has been slow to react.

Where is the plan to bring Canadians back to Canada?

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is completely wrong and unfair with respect to the Canadian efforts in that part of the world.

We just heard from my colleague, the Minister of National Defence. In addition to that, we are sending hundreds of emergency travel documents to assist Canadians who may need them. We have consular services established at the American Club in Kathmandu. I would encourage Canadians and their families to contact the Emergency Watch and Response Centre for further information.

People are doing an outstanding job and they should have the support of the Liberals.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN COAST GUARD

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us get back to the Canadian Coast Guard. A former maritime lawyer said that if the United States Coast Guard scored an eight or nine on a worldwide 10-point scale, Canada would score a one or two, which is far from a passing grade.

This is particularly critical for my riding, since a crab fishing boat, the *Frédérique.C. II*, is currently on fire off the coast of Rimouski. It took more than three hours for the Canadian Coast Guard to respond with its ship the *Cap-Percé*, based in Tadoussac. We can only imagine what would have happened if the search and rescue centre in Quebec City had been shut down, as the Conservatives planned.

When will this government take action?

[English]

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have improved our ability to respond to these events, including new funding, new tools and ensuring that the companies responsible are the ones who pay. Under our government, investments in the Canadian Coast Guard have increased by 27%. By the way, the opposition voted against this.

The situation in Quebec that the member speaks of is currently being monitored by the Coast Guard.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week our Minister of Finance tabled a balanced budget in this House. Now that we have balanced our budget, we will help middle-class families balance theirs through new measures, like the enhanced family tax cut, the home accessibility tax credit and the universal child care benefit, which will benefit 100% of families with children.

Could the Minister of State for Social Development please inform this House what she is hearing everyday Canadians say about our new measures to support them?

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, recently I met with Emmanuel. He prepares taxes for everyday Canadian families. He said that the best thing

about his job over the last few weeks is the look on the faces of middle-class Canadians when they see their tax return because of our family tax cut and our expanded benefits.

The difference between this government and the New Democrats and the Liberals is we believe this money belongs to Canadians. The Liberals and the New Democrats think that money belongs in the government coffers and that somehow it is our revenue. No, it is Canadians' money and we believe it should be in their pockets.

* * *

● (1505)

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, despite this government's smoke and mirrors about the fight against terrorism and despite the peanuts it has allocated to law enforcement agencies, there is absolutely nothing in this budget to prevent violent extremism, to support research, or to combat radicalization in the community or in our prisons.

On the contrary, we learned that the Kanishka project will not be renewed. While many countries in the world have no problem investing in these areas, Canada is still lagging behind.

Will the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness take real action—yes, real action—and propose a real policy to combat violent extremism?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, our government has long been investing in prevention. For example, there is our counterterrorism strategy, which the New Democrats unfortunately opposed.

My colleague may think that \$300 million is peanuts, but I think that money is crucial to our police forces, our intelligence agencies and our border services.

Furthermore, I invite my colleague to examine the budget, which will improve security on the Hill. We will continue to invest in prevention through our programs to prevent and combat crime.

Let us be serious about the fight against terrorism. I urge all members to support the implementation of measures to protect the public.

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THE ECONOMY

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, oil prices have done nothing but drop recently. Canada knows how important the oil industry is and how the price of oil can affect our finances, given that every dollar less costs the government \$150 million.

In budget 2015, the Minister of Finance predicts that the price per barrel will rise from \$54 in 2015 to \$78 in 2019. However, in the 2014 budget, there was no mention of the fact that the price of oil would drop in 2015.

The Budget

How can the minister predict this rise in oil prices when the world situation is so unstable? Is the minister balancing his budget by manipulating the forecasts?

[English]

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the economic outlook in budget 2015 is based on an average of private sector forecasts, as has always been the case since the mid-1990s. This year was no different. Private sector economists agree that this was a prudent basis for the economic forecast.

Our balanced budget, low-tax plan will create jobs and economic growth for Canadians with measures like cutting the small business tax rate to 9%. We know that the opposition parties would take those away.

Canadians understand they are better off with this Conservative government.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of Reginald Daws, member of the Air Force, who is receiving today the Royal Canadian Air Force Member of the Year award.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to follow up on the question from the member for Hamilton Mountain and the comments that were made by the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is responsible for the executive branch of government. He alone is responsible for the quality of appointments, whether they are for the ministry or parliamentary secretaries. Canadians definitely deserve answers when the opposition asks the Prime Minister to account for the quality of those appointments.

I would like to say very clearly that Canadians deserve answers, but they are not getting them from the Conservative government. However, I would ask you to consider and allow the questions.

The Speaker: I appreciate the member raising this point. As he knows, I have already ruled on the matter.

The questions as I heard them had nothing to do with the executive branch of government nor with the administration of government. They had to do with a now private individual, a former member of the House. The member may be interested and may wish to ask the questions, but those must be done outside of question period, which as he well knows, is for the purpose of holding the government to account for actions of government, government departments, government spending and things like that.

I have given several rulings on this matter, including a very comprehensive ruling in January or February 2014. I can double-check for the member and I would be happy to send it to him.

Members are given a great deal of latitude to pose their questions, and I am sure that he and his team will find ways to use their time for questions to hold the government to account for actions of the government, but not of private citizens or things that are outside the purview of government.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1510)

[English]

THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE

The House resumed consideration of the motion that this House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government and of the amendment.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Whitby—Oshawa has seven minutes left for her remarks.

Mrs. Pat Perkins (Whitby—Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, economic action plan 2015 proposes to increase the tax-free savings account annual contribution limit to \$10,000. Whether it is saving for retirement, the purchase of a home, or starting a business, Canadians can greatly benefit from the wide range of tax-free investment options that the TFSA is offering them. I am happy to say that there are now 11 million Canadians who have opened up accounts to save for what matters to them.

Support for Canadians and their families is best complemented with smart measures like relief for job-creating businesses.

First, we must not forget that small businesses are the backbone of our economy and they make invaluable economic contributions. Our government is proudly keeping its promise of delivering measures that help foster job creation for small businesses, which make up 50% of Canada's total private sector workforce. That is why economic action plan 2015 proposes to reduce the small business tax rate to 9% by 2019, which is the largest tax rate cut for small businesses in more than 25 years. This measure will reduce taxes for small businesses and their owners by an estimated \$2.7 billion over the 2015-16 to 2019-20 period.

In addition, the economic action plan also supports thousands of manufacturing jobs across Ontario, for example, such as the many found in my riding of Whitby—Oshawa. Our government has proposed funding for manufacturers through the new automotive supplier innovation program, which includes providing \$100 million over five years to help Canadian automotive suppliers gain a competitive edge through new innovative products and processes. Of this amount, \$50 million will be reallocated starting in 2015-16 over three years from the automotive innovation fund and new resources of \$50 million will be provided over a two-year period starting in 2018-19.

The Budget

The automotive supplier innovation program will complement already existing initiatives, like the automotive innovation fund, by creating a favourable environment for automotive research and development while providing firms with opportunities to enter global supply chains.

In closing, economic action plan 2015 is a sensible plan that will balance our budget and directly benefit all Canadians. It builds on the disciplined choices that our Prime Minister and the previous minister of finance, the hon. Jim Flaherty, had to make when faced with economic uncertainty, and today it continues to focus on jobs, growth and security for all.

It is no wonder so many entrepreneurs, economists, community groups and experts, such as the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Investment Industry Association of Canada have endorsed the measures that this budget has introduced. I am very proud of our government for bringing forward this balanced budget for all Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Whitby—Oshawa for her speech. I would also like to thank her for tacitly admitting that the measure that the NDP has been defending for years, namely the lowering of the tax rate for small businesses, was a good idea. We commend the Conservative government for including this measure in its budget, even though it waited many years to do so.

That being said, I would like to come back to the motion that my esteemed colleague moved, which I was pleased to support. This motion seeks to amend the budget through substitution. This is the third day of the budget debate, and I am very concerned about the fact that the term “income splitting” is nowhere to be found in the budget nor is it being mentioned in my Conservative colleagues' speeches.

I would like my colleague from Whitby—Oshawa to explain to the House why Conservative members cannot use the term “income splitting”. Did they receive that instruction from the Prime Minister's Office?

• (1515)

[English]

Mrs. Pat Perkins: Mr. Speaker, I think it is rather presumptive to think it has become a taboo term. I think it is a term of which we are very proud. This government has created income splitting for seniors, which has helped keep seniors in their homes and allowed them to live independently. It is creating opportunities for families to live in a fashion in their homes without having all of the financial burdens that they would otherwise have had.

I believe that this government is very proud of the income splitting, as it should be.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think there is some validity to ask the question about the income split, because it is very obvious with respect to this budget that it is an unfair budget. It would not do anything really tangible for Canada's middle class, and it is the middle class that is really going to be driving our economy into the future. That is how we generate

the wealth. We need to invest in our middle class. A healthy, strong middle class will result in a healthy, strong economy for Canada.

When I look at the taxation issue of fairness, Jim Flaherty, the person she quoted in her speech, said that the income split was not on the table; it was something that was not good for Canada, because it would elevate only a few. Fewer than 15% of Canadians would actually benefit from that.

The ones that would be affected hardest would, of course, be the middle class because they are the ones who would foot the bill for it.

I wonder if she believes that Jim Flaherty, when he was the minister of finance, was wrong.

Mrs. Pat Perkins: Mr. Speaker, I think that the income-splitting plan we have before us now is not the same income-splitting plan of which then minister Flaherty was actually speaking. I think there are some significant differences. I believe that minister Flaherty, with the numbers that were before him, made the correct call. I think the current Minister of Finance and the current government, with the information before us, are also making the correct call.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the previous minister, the great Jim Flaherty, did a lot of innovative budgeting for persons with disabilities.

I wonder if the member for Whitby—Oshawa would discuss, perhaps, the EI compensation increase from six weeks to six months, the accessibility home tax credit, the RDSP, the enabling accessibility fund, or anything else that helps Canadians reach their full potential?

Mrs. Pat Perkins: Mr. Speaker, the economic action plan proposes a new permanent non-refundable tax credit rate of 15% for seniors and persons with disabilities who need to improve safety, access, and functionality of their homes. This tax cut would apply on up to \$10,000 of eligible home renovation expenditures per year and provide up to \$1,500 in tax relief.

These improvements would help ensure that seniors and persons with disabilities could have healthy, independent lives in the comfort of their home or their family's home, and they could include things like wheelchair ramps, walk-in bathtubs, wheel-in showers, and grab bars for safety. All of those sorts of things are there, available to be funded, to help all people with disabilities.

• (1520)

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great privilege to be able to speak to economic action plan 2015, which I feel is a capstone on strong, stable Conservative government in terms of Canada's long-term growth prospects in our economy.

Since coming into office in 2006, our government has been squarely focused on ensuring equality of economic prosperity for all Canadians. This means a very purposeful, focused policy approach on this particular issue.

The Budget

After we came into government, between 2006 and 2008, we aggressively paid down Canada's debt. We paid down billions and billions of dollars on Canada's debt during this period, because we understand that we need to have balanced budgets and a reduction in debt in order to ensure long-term economic prosperity for Canadians for generations to come.

However, when the economic downturn hit in 2008, we understood that a large portion of this economic downturn related to debt burden. We knew that if we were going to undertake stimulus measures, which would increase consumer confidence and ensure the long-term prosperity of Canada's economy, those measures needed to be short term and impactful in terms of ensuring economic infrastructure.

That is why we put in place things like the knowledge infrastructure program, which has legacy projects across the country in Canadian universities.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Prince Edward—Hastings, who has wonderful winemakers in his region.

Continuing on, these infrastructure programs left a legacy of economic infrastructure across the country. They positioned Canada for long-term economic success. However, once they were completed, they did not increase the size of government and they did not create entrenched long-term government bureaucracy, which meant that once we were through the worst of the economic downturn, once we started to see a sign of recovery in 2009, our government was squarely focused on coming back to balance.

On this side of the House, we know that budgets do not balance themselves and that we need to be very aggressive in terms of having a plan, both for efficiencies and spending. We have to make sure that, as a government, we understand how to deliver services to Canadians in a most effective and efficient way and be wise stewards of taxpayer dollars but also, on the other side of the balance sheet, create opportunities for growth.

Since 2009, we have aggressively pursued a trade agenda. When we came into office in 2006, I believe the figure was five free trade agreements. We now have more than 40, including historic access into the European market, with more than 500 million new consumers for Canadian goods and services, and entry into the Asian supply chain with this Canada-South Korea free trade agreement.

This places Canada in a historic, world-leading position in terms of attracting foreign direct investment, because we can trade with other nations in an unprecedented way.

We have tried to build a very skilled labour force with things like the Canada job grant and our apprenticeship programs.

The capstone of this budget is that we have created a very low tax burden on both Canadian families and job-creating companies.

Between our coming into office in 2006 and today, a Canadian family of four has \$6,600 more in its pocket than before we came into office. When I listen to members across the aisle and I hear the Leader of the Opposition say that only affects the wealthy, I think we

would be hard-pressed to find a Canadian family to say, "Wait a second; I am rich; that doesn't help me." I think that is actually rich.

When opposition members go to the polls in the fall and try to spread that message to Canadians, they will be in for a very big surprise.

We understand that the role of the state is to get out of the way as much as possible, while ensuring the health and safety of Canadians and creating economic opportunity, not creating government for government's sake and not running on power for power's sake.

In this budget, we have measures such as reducing taxes on small business. Since we came into office in 2006, small businesses pay 44% less in taxes than before we came into office. That is an incredible milestone. That means that small businesses can hire more people, they can innovate, they can spend more money on developing new products and services, they can increase productivity, and they can weather economic storms, because hopefully, they are in a position where they can be liquid.

• (1525)

Canadian families have choice in child care. They have choice in how they spend their finances.

My colleague opposite, in the last question, talked about a taboo topic. I do not think it is taboo to talk about Canadians having more money in their pockets, that somehow being a bad thing, and somehow governments know how to spend Canadians' money better than Canadians do. That is the difference between this side of the House and my colleagues opposite.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, for all those who are watching, of course we hear rumblings from members across the way, because they know we are right. They know that the average Canadian understands this principle. This is not an esoteric debate about whether we should expand the size of government. This is about making ends meet, and our government is the only party that understands that making ends meet means more money in the average Canadian's pocket.

I am the Minister of State for Western Economic Diversification and have a file that looks at the diversification and long-term growth of Canada's economy. We set five priorities after I came into cabinet in 2013 in terms of our portfolio. Those were ensuring that innovative technologies and services could be translated into the Canadian economy in western Canada; that first nations and aboriginal peoples had accelerated economic opportunities in the context of the western Canadian economy; that the industrial technological benefits program, which relates to government procurement and small and medium-sized enterprises in western Canada, ensured they were well positioned to take advantage of these types of programs; that western Canadian SMEs were well positioned to both take advantage of both trade and investment opportunities that have been created through our government's free trade agenda, and be in a position to attract foreign direct investment into western Canada; and of course, that we have a highly skilled labour force.

The Budget

This budget, economic action plan 2015, would impact Canadian businesses and families in western Canada in a very meaningful way. Here are some of the highlights.

I am very excited that western economic diversification will have a role in managing the Canada 150 infrastructure program, which as was outlined in the budget, would see renovations and expansions of community infrastructure as it relates to Canada's 150th anniversary with regard to our innovation agenda.

We have seen increased funding to Canada's tri-council research partners, which is fantastic. I am fully supportive of a strong knowledge-based economy in Canada. We understand that basic research has a strong part in that. We have been one of the few countries in the world to have seen not only a status quo but an increase during an economic downturn, with a balanced budget to support basic research. I include a shout-out to one of my favourite agencies across government, the Canada Foundation for Innovation, which does excellent work in providing basic research infrastructure.

I include a shout-out to my colleagues at the Canadian Intellectual Property Council, CIPC, for advocating for some measures in the budget related to client privilege. For a long time Canadian intellectual property agents have advocated that they should have rights similar to lawyers' in terms of client confidentiality privileges, because this would help protect Canadians' intellectual property in a stronger way. That is in this budget.

I would also like to highlight that some of my colleagues in the NDP might actually be at odds with their leader. They are sending out householders, and I have one here from the member for Ottawa Centre in which he actually highlights all of our government's tax savings. The title of the householder is "Household Tax Tips for 2015". He says here that the Canada child tax benefit, a national child care tax supplement, benefits low- and middle-income families and that the national child care benefit supplement should be something that they provide. He highlights in here that if people have spouses or common-law partners, they should also file for the benefit on an annual basis.

My question is this. For all my colleagues opposite who are standing and saying that this is something that would not benefit Canadians, why would they spend taxpayer dollars sending out information, with a party logo on it, selling the benefits of this particular piece? I am confused.

However, I certainly hope Canadians will not be confused when they go to the polls this fall, because they understand that our government wants more dollars in the pockets of Canadian families, and that is what we would do with economic action plan 2015.

● (1530)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have some questions about the Canada 150 grant because I have a number of places in western Canada, particularly in northwestern B.C., that are looking for opportunities.

I noticed that there was not enough in the budget document about western Canada specifically. I know the member is the Minister of State for Western Economic Diversification so this is important to her. I know there is money there for a telescope in Hawaii, and that is good, but there seems to be a bit of an absence, a bit of a taking for

granted. I know the minister has some answers as to what I may have missed in the 500 pages about western Canada specifically.

Also, what has changed in this budget document is the typical Canadian family. I do not know if members have followed this but in every budget the Conservatives roll out the typical Canadian family is usually made up of two parents, a man and a woman, and two kids. In previous budgets, the woman in that typical family was earning more than the man, but were earning some equivalency. In this latest budget, the woman has taken a dramatic pay cut. I do not know if everybody noticed this, but she took a \$50,000 pay cut in order to apply for income splitting.

Is this the Conservative imagination at work here in terms of what the typical family needs to be, which is that women will have to take this pay cut in order to take advantage of something like income splitting? Canadians are not looking for that. They are looking for a representational government—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. The hon. minister of state.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I will respond very quickly,

With respect to my colleague's first question on the Canada 150 infrastructure program, I look forward to working with him and all of my colleagues from western Canada, regardless of political stripe, on rolling out an excellent program that will benefit all Canadians in western Canada. Members should stay tuned for details to come. We are working hard. Kudos to my staff at Western Diversification Canada, the dedicated public servants who are working on this program.

What is interesting about the latter part of the member's question is that he is entrenching a social more. I did not see anywhere in the budget where it talks about the woman as the smaller income earner. By the member saying that a woman should take a pay cut, he is actually saying that fathers who are allowed to stay home should not be allowed to do this. Income splitting does not allow—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: This is what you put in your budget. This is the example you used.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. I know the minister of state is responding. Honestly, with all of the noise in the chamber, I am even at odds myself to hear what the response is. Therefore, we will have a bit of quiet, we will let the minister of state finish her response and then we will get on to a second question or comment.

The hon. minister of state.

The Budget

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, at the heart of the matter, our tax cuts for families benefit all Canadian families, regardless of gender, ethnicity and demographics. If we look at the graphs that are in the budget, they will show that it impacts low-income Canadians at a much higher rate. We are very proud of that.

I certainly hope my colleague opposite, who I do have a lot of respect for in debate, will support the budget as his colleague from Ottawa Centre has done in his householder.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the questions I had in mind kind of piled up as my hon. colleague continued to speak, so I will try to roll them out and see what she says.

My first comment is that the budget and the minister have ignored the effects of inflation on the budget. If we look at the tri-council budget, it is about \$33 billion, which means that with 1% to 2% inflation rate, which it has been in the last few years, that is \$30 million to \$60 million of lost purchasing power. She mentioned the funds that were announced in the budget. First, we will have to wait an extra year to them and they do not even cover inflation.

The second thing is that she talked about a balanced budget, but she did not talk about the fact that \$2 billion were taken from the reserve. That \$2 billion is what people who do computer programming call a magic number. It is just pulled out of nowhere without really good justification. If a different number had been chosen, would we have a budget surplus?

The third thing I would ask the minister is this. The budget assumes a future price of oil which does not agree with the real price in the market. If we believe in the market, if we believe that we are not smarter than the market, which is a good thing to do, we would use a much more conservative, lower future price for oil.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I would ask my colleague opposite to look to his leader for the definition of “magic number” when he made the statement that budgets would balance themselves. That actually is the definition of “magic numbers”.

When Canadians look to the Liberal Party and hear that it would reverse some of the tax cuts that are in this budget, they probably wonder if leader of the Liberal Party leader, who has existed on a trust fund for many years, thinks they are rich. That is a little rich. When we are talking about magic numbers, or magic eight balls or magic substances, that is probably more closely associated with the leader of the Liberal Party than any of the economists, leaders, business leaders and people who listen to average Canadians. That is who this budget supports.

• (1535)

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am tremendously honoured today to speak on our budget, economic action plan 2015.

In the darkest days of the recession, our government made a very important promise to Canadians. It was a simple promise that once the crisis passed, we would set a course toward a balanced budget. We would not raise taxes to do it. We would control spending and rein in costs. Economic action plan 2015 fulfills that promise.

Canadians can rest assured that our fiscal house is in order. We have balanced the budget, just as families must do every day of their

lives, and we balanced this budget while cutting taxes. Today, the overall tax burden is at its lowest level in 50 years. We balanced the budget while increasing transfer payments, thereby protecting our investment in the education and health care that Canadians cherish.

This is no small achievement. It took a plan, hard work and tough choices. After all, unlike the statement from the opposition, budgets do not balance themselves. We have heard that fallacy so many times.

Now, Canada sets out on a new course. With a balanced budget comes opportunity, the opportunity to put even more money back into the pockets of Canadians, and the responsibility to continue our focus on creating jobs, growth and long-term prosperity. That means cutting taxes even further for hard-working families. It means taking action so businesses can thrive, innovate and expand their markets. It means new and innovative investments in the infrastructure that Canadians rely on, and training a highly skilled workforce to respond to the evolving needs of employers. It means investing in Canada's most sacred responsibility, that of protecting Canadians and securing Canada.

Again, what is very important to our government, and certainly to me, is the fact that this budget would do what we promised to do. Canadians need to know that when their government makes a commitment, it is true to its word. It has been said many times that promises do not pay the bills. It is a lesson, sadly, that our opposition has not taken to heart.

Importantly, this deficit has been reduced from \$55.6 billion at the height of the great recession to a projected surplus of \$1.4 billion for 2015-16. It is necessary, because for all Conservatives, we recognize that we cannot continue to run deficits. Very simply, I and most of colleagues, if not all of them, believe that today's deficits are tomorrow's taxes. We must demonstrate to our young generation that we will not leave them with the obligation of paying for our responsibilities.

Importantly, we have done this while investing in families, seniors, the military, security, veterans, job creation, transfers to the provinces and infrastructure, while still reducing taxes and waste. We have proven that we can create a more prosperous economy, resulting in increased revenues.

I will briefly outline just a few of the positive elements in this budget, and I will touch on only a few because time will not permit me to go on at length.

The Budget

We are supporting jobs and growth. What this particular component is about is tax cuts, training and trades. We are reducing the small business tax rate to 9% by 2019, putting in an estimated \$2.3 billion back into the pockets of job creating entrepreneurs between now and 2020. We are increasing the lifetime capital gains exemption to \$1 million for farmers and fishermen.

We are improving access to financing for Canadian small businesses through the Canada small business financing program. We are expanding the services operated by the Business Development Bank of Canada to help small and medium-sized businesses. We are investing \$14 million over two years to Futurpreneur Canada in support of our young entrepreneurs. We are investing in the action plan for women entrepreneurs to help women business owners succeed.

We are helping innovative companies grow and create jobs through the venture capital action plan. We are taking action to harmonize apprenticeship training and certification requirements in targeted Red Seal trades.

We are investing in world-class research and innovation by providing \$1.5 billion in funding over five years to advance the government's renewed science, technology and innovation strategy. We are continuing to provide \$5.3 billion per year on average and growing for provincial, territorial and municipal infrastructure under the new building Canada plan.

● (1540)

In addition, we will invest another \$750 million over two years, starting in 2017-18, and a billion dollars more ongoing thereafter, to a new public transit fund aimed at building new public transit infrastructure to reduce congestion and fight the gridlock in our large cities.

We are helping families and communities prosper. As has been stated many times, and I know it is so welcome, we will increase the tax-free savings account annual contribution limit to \$10,000, effective in 2015 and subsequent taxation years. About 60% of the individuals contributing the maximum amount had income of less than \$60,000. Overwhelmingly, they are seniors who are taking money from their RRSPs and putting them into their TFSAs so they can have a secure retirement.

We are supporting families through tax cuts, which will give money to 100% of households with children. That is critical. For an average family of four, that is over \$6,000, through the family tax cut and the increased universal child care benefit. We believe moms and dads are absolutely in the best position to look after the interests of their children, and certainly not government bureaucrats.

We are supporting seniors by introducing changes to the registered retirement income fund that would allow them to withdraw less from their tax deferred savings. We are supporting seniors and persons with disabilities by introducing the home accessibility tax credit to help with renovation costs so they can live independently and remain in their homes.

We are enhancing access to post-secondary education by expanding the eligibility for low and middle-income Canada student grants to students in short duration programs.

We are extending the temporary measure that allows a qualifying family member to become the plan holder of a registered disability savings plan.

We are supporting the most vulnerable in our communities by providing an additional \$50 million in 2016-17 to what is already there to support social housing in Canada by allowing social housing providers to pre-pay their long-term, non-renewable mortgages without penalty.

As well, we are improving access to print materials for the visually impaired.

We are introducing a new retirement income security benefit for severely disabled veterans. We are increasing the level of individualized care to veterans requiring regular support by improving the ratio of veterans to case managers. We are expanding the veterans independence program.

Very important as well, we are ensuring the security of Canadians. How? We are increasing National Defence funding by providing the Canadian Armed Forces with an additional \$12 billion, thus ensuring that Canada can and will continue to be a combat capable military, ready to serve at home and abroad.

We are supporting the deployment of the Canadian Armed Forces in order to counter the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. We are countering violent extremism and terrorism by providing additional resources to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and the Canada Border Security Agency.

We are enhancing Canada's capacity to gather foreign intelligence. We are protecting the integrity of our borders by expanding the use of biometric screening to further improve the security and integrity of the Canadian immigration system and facilitating legitimate travel to Canada for low-risk travellers from select visa-required countries.

I have only had a bit of time to highlight a very few of economic action plan 2015's many important initiatives. Therefore, I urge listeners to visit the Department of Finance website, where they will find the complete budget plan and the my benefit site that spotlights individuals, just like anyone listening today, to see how they could benefit from this budget.

Our government is absolutely committed to job creation and economic growth, objectives that have underpinned our economic action plan since its inception in 2009. Implementing policies focused on raising Canada's economic potential and creating stable, well-paying jobs continues to be our government's top priority, and it always will be.

Economic action plan 2015 proposes to take additional steps to achieve these objectives, including eliminating the deficit, as promised.

Maintaining focus on these priorities is the best way to ensure that Canada is prepared to weather any future economic storm. By staying the course and sticking to our proven economic action plan, we are clearly on track to a better future.

The Budget

I thank the numerous groups and individuals in my riding of Prince Edward—Hastings for their wise counsel. I know they are encouraged to see their input has been reflected in this budget, a budget that is designed not only for today but certainly for tomorrow.

• (1545)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Prince Edward—Hastings for his speech on the Conservatives' 2015 budget. We serve together on the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. First and foremost, I must say that he is doing an excellent job as chair of the committee. I really appreciate his work. That brings me to my question, which relates to public safety.

One of the main issues that every member here in the House would like to work on is that of radicalization and terrorism, although we all have different opinions. Various law enforcement agencies from across the country all talk about the same problem: financial resources. As the Minister of Public Safety said during question period, the Conservative budget gives the Canada Border Services Agency, the RCMP and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service \$300 million to combat terrorism across the country. There are two problems with that. First of all, \$300 million is not enough for our law enforcement agencies to put a plan in place to combat terrorism all across the country. Second, most of that money will not be available until 2017. Less than \$20 million will be available between now and then. That is a very small amount, considering the huge impact this issue is having on our communities and our society in general.

I would like to ask my colleague if he thinks that the Conservative government should have presented a plan providing for increased investment in our law enforcement agencies to combat the serious problem of terrorism and radicalization, not only among our young people, but in our communities in general.

[*English*]

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Mr. Speaker, certainly I recognize the contribution of my colleague from across the floor and it is a pleasure to work with her at committee. We have a tone of civility that certainly adds not only to the composition of the committee but also to the good work that we do. Our differences may appear to be so large in the public sphere when they are magnified under a national media perspective. Quite frankly, we share a lot of common values that in most cases we can work through to find a solution, so I thank her for her contribution in working with her.

There is no doubt that any increase to all of our enforcement services, whether it is CSIS, RCMP, NSE or the police services, is always welcome. Is there enough? There is never enough, particularly facing the challenges we do today. But I recognize in dealing with Bill C-51 right now at committee that we understand how much of a challenge we face as a country. I do not want to be melodramatic about it, but it certainly is a serious challenge that requires not only serious dollars, but serious attention to dealing with all the prevention tools that we need.

We have had consultations with these organizations and I am quite confident that we are going to be able to satisfy their needs so they can work for the protection of Canada accordingly.

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to also thank the hon. member for Prince Edward—Hastings for his contribution to the debate on budget 2015.

My question relates to his party's support, or lack of support, for the opposition day motion that was introduced by our party this week with respect to government spending on advertising. He talks much about protecting taxpayer dollars and about making sure that taxpayers are respected, yet it appears Conservatives will not be prepared to support our party's motion calling for an independent commissioner to look at ads that are supposedly out to promote the government's position on various initiatives. Why is that the case?

My second question relates to the whole question of jobs and growth. There again, there is much talk about how this economic action plan will be promoting jobs and growth, yet the Minister of Finance cannot actually tell us how many jobs the budget will produce.

Can the member shed some light on that question?

• (1550)

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Mr. Speaker, I find it almost strange that the member would not want to comment on the budget. He wants to switch to another topic. That says it all to me for a simple reason; I will go through some of my life experiences. I was in the hospitality business for many years where one becomes a student of body language. I sat in the House while the budget was introduced and I understand why the opposition members do not want to talk about the budget. I could see across the floor, opposition members were deflated. They knew that the budget touches literally everybody across this nation in a positive manner.

I can certainly understand wanting to switch the channel, but I welcome the member back to the House and we are pleased to see him in the recovery mode and making a contribution to the House. As I said, whether we agree or disagree, the fact is we are all proud Canadians. From the point of job numbers, the job numbers are going up while the unemployment level is going down. What better indication is there than that, that the country is in good shape with this government?

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Random—Burin—St. George's.

I want to discuss budget 2015 in detail with regard to science and technology and research and experimental development. I would like to start by talking about why that is important. It is important because we must invest in the future. If we want our grandchildren to have well-paying jobs, they need the know-how, the tools, the equipment, the infrastructure and the community in order to be productive. If they are productive, they can command good salaries. We need to stay on the forefront of technology to do that.

The Budget

If we want our grandchildren to have jobs where they have a competitive advantage, if they work in areas where Canada's competitors have a barrier to entry, then science, technology and innovation are a prime source of that advantage. If we want good jobs to stay in Canada for our grandchildren, then we have to develop new industries, not only new companies but new industries, which means companies around emerging technologies but also the supply chain, the partners, the pool of skilled labour, the finance, all of the infrastructure. Those are the things that would create good jobs for our grandchildren.

In light of the finance minister's comment that the Prime Minister's granddaughter could fix any problems in the budget, I say let us give our grandchildren the resources to fix problems, some wealth-generating resources to help them. They will need it because our grandchildren, it seems, will be taxed by the burdens left behind by a short-sighted, closed-minded, innumerate and ideological Conservative government.

I want to talk about the budget in detail now, and I would like to start by looking at federal spending on science, technology, research and development in constant 2007 dollars. This comes from data collected by Statistics Canada. It is government spending on science and technology corrected for inflation. In 2005-06, the spending in all of the federal government was \$10.0 billion. This was just before the Conservatives took power. In 2014-15, the fiscal year just completed, the number, according to Statistics Canada, corrected for inflation, was \$9.1 billion. Therefore, federal government spending has gone down by \$900 million a year before we even get to anything announced in the budget.

Remember that there were cuts to the scientific research and experimental development tax credit announced in 2012 that are not counted, because StatsCan is only counting contracts, grants and contributions and research fellowships. Therefore, that tax credit, which was cut for scientific research and experimental development in the private sector, really kicked in last year and this year, so that in 2014-15, there were \$315 million of cuts to tax credits. This year, there were \$480 million. Next year, there will be \$500 million. This is money that is not going into companies that are doing research and development here in Canada.

I want to now deconstruct what the government would say in reply to that. The government has been saying that \$11 billion in new investments in science, technology and innovation have been made since 2006. I put in a written order paper question, which is Question No. 950, asking for a breakdown of that \$11 billion. The answer shows that when money was moved from one place to another, it was called new spending. Aside from about \$3 billion in stimulus spending right after the recession, there was not really any new spending. When the government talks about this \$11 billion, it does not account for any cuts, especially inside the federal government, such as in Environment, Fisheries and Oceans, StatsCan, and the government does not account for inflation when it quotes this number.

The most egregious example is that the government told me, in the reply to the written order paper question, that included in this \$11 billion was \$110 million a year of new money for IRAP, the industrial research assistance program, and one-time \$400 million for a venture capital fund investment. However, if anybody

remembers budget 2012, that was supposed to be paid for by cuts to the scientific research and experimental development tax credit for the private sector. That \$500 million a year cut in support for the private sector R and D swamps that new spending.

At this point, I want to make some special mention of the cuts to the eligibility of capital expenditure for the scientific research and experimental development tax credits. We have heard from a number of companies that it should not have been eliminated. Some companies are labour intensive, others are much more capital intensive, and there is no good reason for favouring one over the other.

• (1555)

I will say to the credit of the Minister of Industry, who was not the minister in 2012, when he was in my riding of Kingston and the Islands, somebody who owns a company asked him about the exclusion of capital expenditure. He sounded open to reversing that mistake and I hope that he will look at that and change the government policy in the budget implementation legislation.

I would now like to talk about particular lines in the 2015 budget. There is a line in there for CANARIE, which is Canada's Internet backbone. The government said it would spend \$21 million a year for five years. The problem is, that is just continuing the current level of funding, which is \$20 million a year with a little inflation adjustment. Great, it is worth a congratulatory tweet from the minister, but the minister forgot to mention that the budget is now \$20 million. It used to be \$30 million before the government cut the budget in 2012.

Budget 2015 also mentions funding for the CFI, \$1.33 billion over six years. I talked to somebody at CFI who told me it is actually equivalent to just continuing funding at the current level, so there is nothing new there.

National Research Council will get \$60 million a year for the next two years. Two years ago in budget 2013, the government said that it needed to spend an extra \$60 million on top of the \$900 million NRC budget to refocus NRC. It is not clear to me whether it finished refocusing, whether these next two years of funding are required to continue the refocusing because it is taking a lot longer than expected or whether NRC has found a good use for a permanent \$60-million increase to its budget. We cannot tell that from the budget document.

The Budget

MITACS internships, which connect graduate students in Canada by giving them industry experience, get \$14 million a year for four years. Last year, when the last boost to MITACS was announced, budget 2014 moved the NSERC industrial post-doctoral fellowships to MITACS and said that NSERC, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, could use the money left over for other purposes, could reallocate it.

This year, the government moved a different program, the NSERC industrial post-graduate scholarships program, over to MITACS to create internships, but it does not say that any money would be freed for NSERC, so we may actually be losing money over at NSERC to pay for this increase to MITACS. The budget is very different this year than last year. It is not clear at all. It seems to me there will actually be a cut in NSERC.

Since we are talking about the research councils, we could go over their budget. Budget 2015 announces \$46 million for the three research granting councils, starting not this year but next year. Notice the skipping year. The problem is that the three research councils have a \$3-billion budget, so we lose \$30 million to \$60 million every year just from inflation. The government does not mention that. A one-time boost of \$40 million does not even cover the inflation, since we have to wait another year until it starts. Bread and butter research grants across Canada will shrink.

That leads us finally to the new programs. There are new programs. There is money for TRIUMF out of Vancouver, the 30-metre telescope and the Canada first research excellence fund. I am sure that good science will come out of these programs because of the proven quality of Canadian scientists. The point I would make is that the funding on these new programs does not come near what all the cuts have been so far.

Let me just summarize. The Conservative government's spending on science, technology, research and development, according to Statistics Canada, is down \$900 million since it took power. Add to that another \$500 million every year from cuts to the scientific research and experimental development tax credit for the private sector. Add to that another \$102 million cut just because of inflation and the Conservatives have not replaced the effects of inflation. That overwhelms the real new money in budget 2015.

We will hear the members on the Conservative side tout the extra spending. The conclusion is that on the Conservative record on science and technology, if we really dig down into the numbers, look back at the last ten years, look at inflation, look at what has been cut elsewhere in the federal government and in the private sector when it comes to research and development, the talking points of the Conservatives fall apart.

The Conservative government's record on science and technology and research and development is dismal and it is failing our grandchildren.

• (1600)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's take on the budget. He indicated future generations, which I think is extremely important.

When we look at first nations education, for example, the government in its budget has put down that it is going to invest \$200 million. Now, we know that the Liberals are the ones who put the 2% funding cap in place, but I would like the member to acknowledge the math the government has actually put forward. There would be \$200 million divided by 600 first nations. Guess what that would come to? It would be about \$67,000 for each first nation. How much does the member think that would help a first nation community?

I want the member to acknowledge that it was wrong for the Liberals to put in the 2% funding cap and that we need to make sure that there is a very good investment in first nations education. They are the future of this country, but \$67,000 will not go very far.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Mr. Speaker, I will note that the Liberal critic for aboriginal affairs, the member for St. Paul's, brought up this very issue during question period. I am also reminded, although I was not here, that it was the NDP that brought down the government just before the Kelowna accord went into place.

However, I think it is very important for Canada to make sure that aboriginal Canadians are full participants in building the Canada of the future, and education is a very important part of that.

I went to Saskatoon recently and talked to people there about the importance of aboriginal education and the local situation in Saskatchewan. I would just say that we need to return to a Liberal government, and when we return to a Liberal government, we will improve the situation for all of Canada.

The NDP members are laughing and shaking their heads, but they did vote down the government before the Kelowna accord was implemented.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was somewhat intrigued by the earlier question. The member stood up and was somewhat critical of the Liberal Party in terms of a commitment that was made.

The Kelowna accord was a Paul Martin achievement. We had consultation throughout the nation, including with many stakeholders who were chiefs of first nations. It was the NDP, working with the Conservatives, that killed the Kelowna accord. They do not need to give any sort of lesson on not being there when it really mattered for first nations.

In any case, my question is very specific.

Could the member comment on the \$14 million the government has decided to spend on promoting a budget that really is an attack on the middle class because of the taxation that would be imposed on them to fund tax splitting, at \$2 billion a year?

The Budget

●(1605)

Mr. Ted Hsu: Mr. Speaker, I am all in favour of government advertisements when they contain real information and talk about programs that are in place. However, the practice right now seems to be to promote government initiatives that are being debated in Parliament. The problem is that we are not supposed to use public money to influence the public while government legislation or proposals are being debated. The public should decide for itself and not be influenced by advertising, using public funds, until the legislation is passed through Parliament. We could then say that it is government policy. We should make sure that we have real information in these advertisements.

I would call on the government to vote for the Liberal motion, which calls for an independent third party to review advertisements. Maybe a lot of the government advertisements will go through in the future. I do not think the Conservatives should fear that.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to the issues and concerns my constituents of Random—Burin—St. George's have raised with me about the measures contained in the budget we are debating today.

Unfortunately, this is a budget that is unfair and does not generate growth, contrary to what the Conservatives would have us believe. Instead, it provides the most for those who need it the least.

Last Tuesday, the Conservative government ended weeks of procrastination and finally presented the federal budget for 2015. To my disappointment, the Minister of Finance presented a plan to help those Canadians who need it least instead of presenting a plan to help the middle class and those working to join it. Instead of giving all Canadians a real and fair chance of success, the Prime Minister is giving a \$2.2 billion tax break to Canadians through his income-splitting scheme, a program, by the way, the Parliamentary Budget Officer estimates will help only 15% of Canadians.

On top of that, the Prime Minister's decision to raise the retirement age from 65 to 67 and to double the limit for the tax-free savings account is being paid for by taking \$32,000 out of old age security for our elderly, who need it the most.

The Minister of Finance also claims that the budget is balanced, a misleading claim at best. Make no mistake, the budget was not balanced by stimulating the economy and job growth. In fact, the Bank of Canada said last week that the Canadian economy saw zero growth in the first quarter of this year. According to a recent projection by the International Monetary Fund, 139 countries are ahead of Canada for expected growth in 2015, and that projection was made before the recent decline in oil prices.

CIBC has said that job quality is at a 25-year low and is declining. A Statistics Canada survey released earlier this month reported that another 28,000 full-time jobs had disappeared. A recent report in *The Globe and Mail* stated that Canada is in its longest period of anemic job growth, outside of a recession, since 1976, which is when Statistics Canada started keeping comparable records.

This lackluster job growth is bad news for all Canadians but especially for our youth, who need that very first job. As our young people strive to start careers, it becomes harder for them to do so as the economy stagnates and opportunities disappear.

Recently released employment data for the province I represent, Newfoundland and Labrador, shows that unemployment levels are steadily rising. The general unemployment rate for February 2015 was 12.6%, up nearly a full percentage point from February 2014. For the same period, the unemployment rate for young people aged 15-24 was 16.4%.

Adult children are moving back in with their parents, because many cannot get that first job, and if they are lucky enough to secure work, if jobs are available, they are part-time, making it difficult, if not impossible, for them to survive by their own means. That is the impact such a weak economy is having on parents and their children.

While the government provides tax giveaways to those who need them least, there are people throughout our country who are struggling to make ends meet and are having to tighten their belts to provide for their families. Household debt is at a record high. Two-thirds of middle-class parents are worried about affording post-secondary education for their children.

No, the budget was not balanced through sound economic management. The budget is not actually balanced at all, not to mention that over the last decade, the Conservative government has added \$150 billion to the national debt and that unemployment is higher than it was before the recession.

The Conservatives brought the books back into the black by selling off assets like the remaining GMC stocks and by cutting the contingency fund by \$2 billion, not exactly a plan for the future. Contingency funds are meant to deal with unforeseen circumstances, emergencies that might arise.

Just this past January, the Minister of National Defence said, "We won't be using a contingency fund. A contingency fund is there for unforeseen circumstances, like natural disasters".

●(1610)

He apparently forgot to tell the Minister of Finance.

The Conservatives are clearly more focused on looking good before the election than they are on growing the economy and helping Canadians in need. We only need to look at where money is being spent to see where the government's real priorities are and who they appear to have written off. This budget is clearly more about politics than people.

There is no new funding for Marine Atlantic, which faced a \$108.1 million cut earlier this year. It is not only a vital part of Newfoundland and Labrador's economy but serves as an extension of the Trans-Canada Highway, connecting the province to the rest of the country. With the Conservative government fixated on cutting expenditures at all costs and demanding what I think is an unreasonable percentage of cost recovery from Marine Atlantic, the crown corporation found it necessary to increase its fares by a total of 11% over the past three years. Less government funding may well result in yet more fare increases.

The Budget

For those producing goods for sale on the mainland, higher shipping costs using Marine Atlantic make their goods less competitive. For those shipping products to our province, the high cost is added to the cost of the product and is absorbed by the consumer. For those in the tourism industry, high fares are a deterrent to visitors. Fare increases impact everyone.

Yet another example of where the government has fallen short in this budget is that it does not address the immediate needs of the Canadian Armed Forces. Although the mission to Iraq has been expanded, the last few years have seen major cuts to the Canadian Armed Forces' bottom line. Budget 2015 defers all new defence spending to 2017. Is it any wonder this budget is being referred to as budget 2017 and not budget 2015?

Canadians are tired of seeing the Conservative government pay lip service to issues affecting our enlisted men and women. For those who are presently deployed or will be deployed this year and next to an extremely dangerous conflict zone, the fact that funding for upgrades to resources has been pushed out to 2017 has to be worrisome for those directly involved and for their families. Whenever we ask our Armed Forces personnel to put themselves in a situation where in many cases their lives are at risk, the very least we owe them is our full support by providing them with all the resources necessary to keep them as safe as possible. It is irresponsible and disrespectful to offer anything less.

Again, it speaks volumes about the misguided priorities of the government when it is more concerned about presenting the illusion of a balanced budget and saving \$2 billion dollars in taxes for those who need the break least than it is in supporting our military.

However, no one should be surprised. Over the past 10 years we have repeatedly seen the callous attitude of the Conservatives toward our enlisted men and women and veterans. We watched as the former Minister of Veterans Affairs ignored the concerns being raised by a spouse of a veteran.

Veterans are forced to repeatedly prove that they are still amputees as a result of service injuries. As Matt Edwards, a veteran from Newfoundland, said, could the government not save money and make lives easier for veterans by streamlining medical approvals? Common sense solutions seem to elude this government.

My Liberal colleagues and I believe that every Canadian deserves a real chance at success and that budgets should be balanced by growing the economy, not by using smoke and mirrors or creative accounting, which we witnessed last week with the Conservative government.

We need to cancel the Prime Minister's unfair income-splitting scheme, from which only 15% of Canadians will benefit. We need to reverse the unthinkable decision that forces seniors to wait two extra years to receive their OAS benefits. It is a particularly cruel decision for those seniors who will have no other source of income at age 65 and will have to rely on the welfare assistance programs in the provinces. Not everyone is able to continue to work past 65, as some Conservatives have said is an option.

• (1615)

Canadians are being served a budget that would benefit those who need help the least. The needs of the most vulnerable in Canada,

including seniors, students, and veterans, are being ignored by the Conservative government. It is obvious Canada needs new economic management with measures to protect the most vulnerable and a plan to build the middle class and grow the economy.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question for the member is very simple. Why do the Liberals and the NDP continue to oppose all the measures our government introduces for the middle class? About 600,000 seniors with low income below \$60,000 are currently maximizing their TFSA room, and would benefit from the measure. About 11 million Canadians have a tax-free savings account, with the vast majority of these accounts belonging to low-income and middle-income earners. Why would the Liberals and the NDP take away education savings, retirement savings, and first-time homebuyer savings from the middle class? Why are they so against prosperity for the middle class?

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, the answer to my colleague's question is an obvious one. This budget does so little to help the middle class and those who are trying hard to become a part of the middle class that no one in their right mind could possibly support it. If we look at the tax breaks that are in this budget, they are geared to those who need them least.

It is time to listen to what Canadians are saying. That is what we have been doing as Liberals. We have been listening to Canadians from coast to coast to coast, hearing what their priorities are and determining from our perspective, having listened to what they had to say, what it is we need to be doing as a government, and what the Conservative government needs to be doing, instead of ignoring the priorities of Canadians.

It is not about the Conservative government. It is about Canadians. It is about their money, taxpayer dollars, that the government is deciding to use to put in place programs and give tax breaks that are of no value. The income-splitting scheme would benefit 15% of Canadians. How is that a responsible decision?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

Speaking of income splitting, when the Minister of State for Western Economic Diversification spoke in defence of her colleague who gave a speech earlier—unless I missed something, and my colleague can correct me if I am wrong—she refused to use the words “income splitting”.

I have to say that such self-censorship on the part of Conservative cabinet members is certainly a mystery. They refuse to use the words “income splitting”, which are actually nowhere to be found in the budget.

Can my colleague comment on the restriction that seems to be in place for certain Conservative caucus members, or at least for the Conservative cabinet?

The Budget

● (1620)

[English]

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, what is happening here is it has become pretty obvious that Canadians are not reacting favourably to the income-splitting scheme. They have heard what has been said in terms of the number of Canadians who would benefit from this and they are realizing that this was not a good measure to put in the budget. As their former finance minister, the late Jim Flaherty, said, this is not a good initiative. In fact, he spoke extensively about that and tried to convince his colleagues that it was not the right thing to do. What happened? Because the Prime Minister had committed to it and had committed to those who deserve it least so they could benefit from this high tax break, of course they went ahead with it, much to the chagrin of most Canadians who are now realizing that they will not benefit from this. They do not like the measure that is contained in this budget.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my colleague on her speech about the bogus balanced budget, “B3” for want of a better term. I ask her, what was the emergency to get to the bogus balanced budget since the Conservatives sold off GM shares and lost \$100 million doing that and they raided \$2 billion from the emergency contingency fund to get to the bogus balanced budget? What was the emergency, other than the Prime Minister’s mandate to get to a bogus balance?

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, anyone who is listening and everyone in this House, or at least those of us in the opposition, realize that the emergency is the federal election that is coming up in October.

This budget is more about politics than it is about people. The government is ignoring the most vulnerable in our society with this budget. There is no emergency. The former minister of defence said that the government would not use the contingency fund, but guess what? The government used the contingency fund. According to the minister, contingencies are only meant for natural disasters, so I would ask where the natural disaster is, other than the fact that there is ever the possibility that the government could get re-elected.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I see the hon. member for Mississauga—Erindale is rising on a point of order.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask for unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, during the debate pursuant to Standing Order 53.1 on Wednesday, April 29, 2015, any Member rising to speak during debate may indicate to the Chair that he or she will be dividing his or her time with another Member.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Does the hon. member for Mississauga—Erindale have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before we resume debate, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier, National Anthem; the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, la Francophonie.

Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice.

* * *

THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE

The House resumed consideration of the motion that this House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government and of the amendment.

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Fleetwood—Port Kells.

It is an honour today to rise to speak to economic action plan 2015, a balanced budget and low-tax plan for jobs, growth and security. Our budget builds upon the government’s strong record of job creation while keeping taxes low for all Canadians. This is a record that I am proud of and it is a record that all Canadians should be proud of. This is also a record of promises made and promises kept.

Since coming into office, our Conservative government’s top priority has been to create jobs, growth and long-term prosperity. This is a priority shared by the citizens of my riding in Mississauga as well as by all Canadians. All the jobs lost during the recession have been recovered, and in addition, more than 1.2 million net new jobs have been created since the depths of the downturn, but we need to do even more to create jobs in a tough global economy. In economic action plan 2015, we are doing exactly that.

The Province of Ontario will receive a record high transfer payment to support health care, education and social programs. Ontario will receive \$20.4 billion in federal transfers this year. That is an increase of \$9.6 billion from under the old Liberal government. This is an increase of 88% since the last Liberal government, prior to 2006. Ontario’s share of all federal transfers to other governments is now at 35%. That is up from 30% 10 years ago.

The Budget

Canadians want to be reassured that their government is spending their money wisely and responsibly. In other words, Canadians have an expectation that we will live within our means. What better way to demonstrate this principle than by balancing the budget. Families in Mississauga have to balance their budgets and they expect governments to do likewise. Furthermore, beyond illustrating fiscal prudence, balancing the budget results in a number of other positive fiscal outcomes. A balanced budget means that our government can keep taxes low and ensure that taxpayer dollars are used to support the programs that Canadians depend on, rather than paying interest costs.

Canada's federal debt to GDP ratio is expected to fall to 27.9% in 2017-18, below its pre-recession low. A balanced budget means that Canada's total government net debt burden is the lowest of any G7 country and among the lowest of the advanced G20 countries. This contrasts with the comparatively poor fiscal performance of the Liberal Government of Ontario. While the federal debt to GDP ratio is at a pre-recession low and going lower, the Ontario debt to GDP ratio is at a record level of 40% and is forecast to increase even further.

I would now like to discuss some of the specific measures in this budget that would directly assist the people living in my riding.

Economic action plan 2015 delivers on our 2011 election platform promises with a low-tax plan to help families make ends meet. The family tax cut or income splitting for families plan provides a tax credit of up to \$2,000 for couples with children under the age of 18. This is effective for the 2014 taxation year, and Canadians have just a few more days to take advantage of this. This will be very helpful to the many hard-working young families who are struggling with expensive mortgages and the high cost of raising and educating children in the GTA. I am so pleased that our government is able to deliver on this promise.

In addition, the current universal child care benefit, which has been so helpful to families with young children, will be increased to \$160 per month per child for children under the age of six, and a new benefit of \$60 per child per month for children age six through seventeen will be added, again effective January 1, 2015. This government is putting taxpayers' money back in their pockets so they can spend it on the priorities of their families.

In addition, the budget includes a \$1,000 increase in each of the maximum dollar amounts that can be claimed under the child care expense deduction. We are also following through on our promise to double to \$10,000 the maximum annual amount that Canadians can contribute to their tax-free savings accounts. These are so popular that 11 million Canadians, or almost one-third of the population, have opened tax-free savings accounts.

We have also doubled the maximum amount of expenses that may be claimed on the child fitness tax credit to \$1,000 as of 2014. We have made that credit refundable for the 2015 and subsequent taxation years.

• (1625)

As we are all aware, small businesses are the engine of the Canadian economy. They represent 90% of all businesses in the country and employ half of Canada's working men and women in the

private sector. That is why I was pleased to see that economic action plan 2015 proposes to cut the small business tax rate to 9% by 2019. Our government previously reduced this rate to 11% in 2008. Now, we would go even further. Once the budget is fully implemented, our government would have cut small business taxes by almost 50%. That is 50% more of their earnings that small businesses could use to invest in their companies and create jobs.

Many new Canadians in Mississauga and across Canada create and operate small businesses, and this tax rate reduction would be welcome news for them. For many citizens in Mississauga, removing barriers to foreign credential recognition is important in order to get highly skilled workers back into the workforce. That is why our Conservative budget proposes to reallocate up to \$35 million over five years to make the foreign credential recognition loans pilot project permanent, to support internationally trained workers in their pursuit of foreign credential recognition. Under the first two years of the pilot project, nearly 1,500 loans totalling \$9 million were dispersed, with average loan amounts of approximately \$6,000 nationwide. I know that many residents in Mississauga have taken advantage of this loan program, and many more will be happy to see that this program would be extended over the next five years.

With economic action plan 2015, our government continues to demonstrate its support for the manufacturing sector. To support the continued investment in machinery and equipment, and to help bolster productivity, economic action plan 2015 proposes to provide manufacturers with an accelerated capital cost allowance at a rate of 50% on a declining balance basis for eligible assets acquired after 2015 and before 2026. Providing this new incentive for this extended period of time would help to provide businesses with planning certainty for larger projects where the investments may not be completed until several years after the original investment decision is made, and for longer term investments with multiple phases.

Mississauga is a fast-paced, vibrant, and growing city, and I was happy to see that this budget would provide additional funding that would allow our city to maintain and update its current infrastructure. I was especially pleased to see the commitment of an additional \$750 million over two years and \$1 billion per year ongoing thereafter for a new and innovative public transit fund. To clarify, this is new, additional money that could be added to existing funds for transit infrastructure projects under the robust \$5.35 billion per year new building Canada plan. This is the largest and longest infrastructure investment plan in Canadian history.

In the time available, I have only been able to highlight a small percentage of the benefits that would be derived by the hard-working people of Mississauga from economic action plan 2015. However, what is abundantly clear is that, while we are focused on creating jobs and keeping taxes low, the Liberals would adopt their same old high-tax, high-debt agenda that would threaten jobs and set working families back.

The Budget

People do not have to take my word for it. There were two budgets introduced in Canada last week, the federal budget of Canada and the budget of the Liberal Government of Ontario. They can compare and contrast those two budgets. They will see a balanced budget at the federal level and a budget at the provincial level that is seriously in deficit, mortgaging the futures of our children and grandchildren.

Only our Conservative government can be trusted to manage Canada's economy and keep taxes low for the people of Mississauga and all Canadians across the country. I strongly encourage all hon. members to support budget 2015.

• (1630)

[Translation]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice for his speech.

I would like to talk about TFSAs. As we know, the Conservatives do not seem to know what they are trying to accomplish with this measure. We saw that at the Standing Committee on Finance. The assistant parliamentary budget officer, Mostafa Askari, said:

[English]

...there is no indication that the amount of money that has gone to TFSAs is actually new savings. It's very likely that most of it is the money that was saved in other instruments and had been transferred to a TFSA.

[Translation]

Mr. Askari showed that tax sheltering TFSAs did not result in new savings.

Why is he okay with billions of dollars in public money being thrown out the window when this mechanism is not even leading to new savings?

[English]

Mr. Bob Dechert: Mr. Speaker, in his last comment, the member illustrated the difference between our government's thinking and the thinking of the opposition. He said it was using government money, public money. This is not government money. This is the money of taxpayers themselves.

The opposition likes to bemoan the fact that Canadians have a fairly low savings rate and high personal debt. Here is a program that actually incentivizes people to save money.

Just last weekend, the Liberal member for Markham—Unionville, who is one of the Liberal finance critics, stated that they agree with the tax-free savings account. They think it is actually a good vehicle for incentivizing people to save money. They just do not think it should be increased over the current status quo.

There seems to be some confusion on the opposition benches as to whether or not they think this is a good idea. However, 11 million people are taking advantage of this, and that is new money that is accumulating capital growth, tax free. It is a pool of capital that is available to Canadian businesses for investment in job creation going forward. It is a great thing for Canadians, and 11 million people would not be doing it if it was not a good idea.

• (1635)

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, here are three things.

First, the parliamentary secretary talked about provincial deficits on the Liberal side. Well, the Conservative Party in Newfoundland and Labrador also has a deficit that is approaching \$1 billion. Let us take a look at that in perspective.

The second part is about the TFSAs. He mentioned my colleague from Markham—Unionville. The point is that what the Conservatives are doing is promising something that few people can avail themselves of. The vehicle of the TFSA, as he puts it, is used by people in the \$60,000 a year range.

Here is the problem with that. Of most of these people, less than 20%, took advantage of the maximum of up to \$5,000. Now, the Conservatives would increase it to \$10,000, which even fewer people will take advantage of. It is not the vehicle. It is that the amount that can be invested has been increased, which few people will take advantage of.

The problem is that the Conservatives have also raised the age of eligibility of 65 to 67. That is the problem. That is a huge problem. It takes \$28,000 from vulnerable individual seniors.

Here is my question. Let us talk about a contingency fund. Here is a quote from the Minister of National Defence, who sits in this House right now.

We won't be using a contingency fund. A contingency fund is there for unforeseen circumstances, like natural disasters.

The Minister of National Defence said that on January 18 of this year. Perhaps the parliamentary secretary would like to comment on that.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Mr. Speaker, I think most of that question had to do with tax-free savings accounts. I would like to talk about that for a moment.

If it is a good idea at \$5,000—and this is what the Liberals are saying, that it is a great way to incentivize people to save and that is what we want people to do, save for their retirement, save for their families, save for their children's education, and save for that rainy day—why would it be a bad idea to give them a little more encouragement?

I have known lots of high-income people in my life. What I will say is that some of the lower-income people are the better savers. They know how important saving is to their way of life. They cannot look forward to that big paycheque coming in next week or at the end of the month, so they save. They put their pennies aside.

This would give them a great incentive to earn a little extra tax-free money on the capital gains on those savings. That will give them a secure retirement. Seniors are some of the biggest beneficiaries of this. Seniors with an income of \$60,000 or less put the maximum amount in these tax-free savings accounts.

The Budget

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before we go to resuming debate, I have just one observation from this afternoon and, I think, in general for the budget debate. I know it is of great interest for hon. members to participate in these debates. Of course they are very important.

Typically we only have the five minutes for questions and comments, so I would perhaps encourage hon. members to keep their comments and interventions concise, both those who are putting a comment or question and those responding. I am not making any mention in particular of the last round. It is just that it has been a general thing over the past day or two.

In this way, by keeping the comments and interventions more concise, more hon. members will be able to participate in the debate in the House.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Fleetwood—Port Kells.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise today on behalf of the constituents of Fleetwood—Port Kells to participate in the debate on the 2015 budget.

Our government is responding to the needs of my constituents. We are helping young families, seniors, veterans, and small business owners. We are putting more money into the pockets of residents, so they can raise their families and save for retirement.

Under our leadership, Canada has created more than 1.2 million new jobs since the recession, but we live in uncertain times and the global economy remains fragile. That is why economic action plan 2015 would continue our government's focus on creating more jobs and growing the economy in Surrey and across Canada.

Importantly, at the same time, this is a balanced budget. This means more tax cuts for Canadian families and individuals and less debt for future generations. It would ensure that taxpayer dollars are used to support important social services, such as health care and education.

Economic action plan 2015 includes key measures to support Surrey families and the B.C. economy, including cutting taxes for small businesses. Economic action plan 2015 proposes to further reduce the small business tax rate to 9% by 2019. Due to measures taken since we formed government, we have reduced taxes for small businesses by almost 50%.

On tax-free savings accounts, economic action plan 2015 proposes to increase the tax-free savings account annual contribution limit to \$10,000, effective for the 2015 taxation year. There are now 11 million Canadians who have opened accounts, and of those who contributed the maximum amount, 60% have incomes below \$60,000.

On supporting job-creating businesses, economic action plan 2015 proposes to provide tax relief to the LNG industry and new funding for the forestry sector to help diversify their markets to emerging economies. These initiatives would help create jobs and economic growth for British Columbia.

On national security, we would ensure that our armed forces continue to have what they need to accomplish the dangerous tasks Canadians ask of them. Economic action plan 2015 proposes to

increase the National Defence budget by \$11.8 billion over 10 years. We would now provide new funding to help counter violent extremism and terrorism.

In my riding of Fleetwood—Port Kells, there are more than 12,000 households with young children. In total, there are more than 25,000 children living in those homes. Economic action plan 2015 would benefit 100% of those families and children. It would do so by lowering taxes and increasing benefits.

We have recently introduced new tax relief and benefits to help make life more affordable for Canadian families, including increasing the universal child care benefit. For each child under the age of six, parents would receive a benefit of \$160 per month, which is up from \$100 per month. The universal child care benefit would be expanded to children age 6 through 17, allowing parents to receive a benefit of \$60 per month, or \$720 per year. There are 18,000 children in my riding who would be eligible for this benefit.

We are also introducing the family tax cut, which is a federal tax credit that would allow a higher income spouse to effectively transfer up to \$50,000 of taxable income to a spouse in a lower tax bracket, providing up to \$2,000 in tax relief.

Since 2006, our government has introduced more than 180 tax relief measures, which will provide tax relief and benefits of up to \$6,600 dollars for a typical Canadian two-earner family of four in 2015.

● (1640)

There are also nearly 12,000 seniors in my riding. Our government recognizes that Canada's seniors have helped build and make our country great. That is why, since taking office, we have provided over \$2.3 billion in annual tax relief for seniors and pensioners, including removing over 85,000 seniors from the tax rolls, introducing pension income splitting, doubling the pension income tax credit to \$2,000, increasing the age credit amount by \$2,000, and establishing the landmark tax-free savings account.

Budget 2015 builds on this impressive record of support for seniors by reducing the minimum withdrawal requirement from registered retirement income funds, introducing the home accessibility tax credit to help with renovation costs so seniors can remain in their homes and, as I mentioned before, increasing the tax-free savings account annual contribution limit to \$10,000.

The Budget

I would be remiss if I did not also mention infrastructure. Canada has led the G7 in public investment growth over the last decade. Our government's unprecedented investments in infrastructure, the most significant in our country's history, have already yielded significant results for hard-working Canadians and their families, ensuring the resilience of our economy and creating jobs. These investments will ensure Canada's future economic growth for years to come.

Budget 2015 adds to this record by continuing to provide \$5.35 billion per year on average for provincial, territorial and municipal infrastructure under the new building Canada plan, the largest, longest-running federal infrastructure commitment in our country's history. The budget also provides an additional \$750 million over two years, starting in 2017-18, and \$1 billion per year ongoing thereafter for a new and innovative public transit fund to promote public transit infrastructure investment in a manner that is affordable for taxpayers and efficient for commuters. The ability to invest this substantial amount in targeted infrastructure is a direct result of the government's responsible actions to return to a fiscal balance.

Already there has been unprecedented federal investment in B.C.'s Lower Mainland and Surrey under this Conservative government, impacting nearly every aspect of the lives of hard-working families. Since taking office, we have invested billions of dollars into British Columbian communities. We are making a real difference in the everyday lives of Surrey residents. In total, our government has spent \$1.5 billion on local projects since 2006. This includes the new RCMP headquarters in Green Timbers, the South Fraser Perimeter Road and the new Surrey Library.

I have personally made over 50 announcements, totalling more than \$40 million. All were in Surrey and most in Fleetwood—Port Kells. These investments are resulting in local jobs, local opportunities and local facilities for Surrey residents.

It is all about helping hard-working families, the unemployed, seniors and youth and it is also about improving our communities, creating jobs and stimulating the economy.

While the opposition parties support high taxes and high debt that will threaten jobs and set working families back, our Conservative government can be trusted to manage Canada's economy and keep taxes low for the people of Surrey. The province of British Columbia will receive record-high transfer payments to support health care, education and social programs. Specifically, B.C. will receive \$6.1 billion in federal transfers this year, a 34% increase from under the Liberals.

Our government is acting prudently and decisively to ensure that Canada's economy creates good jobs and sustains a high quality of life for Canadian families.

We are proud of our plan that is lowering taxes and providing benefits directly to families in Surrey for them to reinvest in the Canadian economy. It is a plan that I will be happy to take to the doorsteps of the people in my riding.

With economic action plan 2015, our government remains squarely focused on the number one priority of Canadians, with a forward-looking plan to create jobs and grow the economy in British Columbia and across Canada. It is a good budget for Canada, for British Columbia and for Surrey.

● (1645)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is very evident that the government does not know what the priorities of Canadians are, much less what the priorities of Ontarians are.

When it comes to manufacturing, there is very little in the budget that will actually assist the manufacturing sector, especially considering the fact that Conservatives lost 277,000 manufacturing jobs. As far as northern Ontario goes, the Conservatives never even mentioned northern Ontario in the budget. It is very problematic.

More and more people need some assistance. They need to ensure that life is more affordable. Why has the Conservatives chosen to give to the wealthiest as opposed to help those who need it the most, those who have a hard time making ends meet?

● (1650)

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Mr. Speaker, Canada's economic action plan is working for all Canadians. It is not only for the wealthy. It is for all Canadians in general.

Also, Canada has demonstrated one of the best economic performances among the G7 countries over the recovery. Over 1.2 million more Canadians are working than at the end of the recession. The majority of these new jobs have been full-time positions, not part time, in high wage private sector industries.

Our government has done a lot in the manufacturing sector as well.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to touch on something that Conservatives keep saying, which is promise made, promise kept.

Here is a statement that maybe is shrouded in a promise, but nevertheless it came from the Minister of National Defence. In January 2015, "We won't be using a contingency fund. A contingency fund is there for unforeseen circumstances, like natural disasters". The budget uses \$2 billion of that fund to balance the budget. Why did Conservatives use that fund if they truly believed they should not have?

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, Canada's economic action plan 2015 is a comprehensive agenda to bolster Canada's long-term economic strength and to promote job growth. It is a plan not just for the next 12 months or three years, but it is a plan for the next generations to come. Our government is proposing measures that will ensure long-term prosperity and growth. It is also about putting the country on track for success, both now and going forward.

The Budget

Economic action plan 2015 will ensure that we are focused on enabling and sustaining Canada's long-term economic growth.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, the member keeps talking about how the government has balanced the budget. It has balanced the budget on those who are more affected by it, by those who are not able to access services such as employment insurance, by those who will maybe need that contingency fund. For example, we had some flooding in Wawa a couple of years ago. We also had some in Thessalon and area this past year.

How will the government make ends meet for these people? How will it respond to these emergencies if it dipped into the contingency fund? The Conservatives have not balanced the budget because of all of the money they have raised or because they have done things the right way. They have balanced the budget by cutting programs such as the sexual exploitation program that is derived through the RCMP, programs for those who need it the most. How shameful is that?

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Mr. Speaker, budget 2015 reaffirms our government's commitment to reduce employment insurance premiums for over 60 million Canadians in 2017. In 2017, the government will implement the seven year break-even EI premium rate setting mechanism, which will ensure that EI premiums are no longer needed to pay for the EI program over time.

• (1655)

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to the budget today. I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Edmonton—St. Albert.

I would like to talk about a few aspects of the budget that are of particular concern to me, especially with regard to public safety and national security. First, with regard to public safety, the government has unfortunately not invested anything in prevention. The budget allocates \$292.6 million to the RCMP, of course, to the Canada Border Services Agency and to CSIS. That is a small step that we cannot ignore, but when we look at the breakdown of that funding, we see that \$18 million will be allocated in 2015-16 and that \$92 million will be allocated in 2019-20.

As I was saying in question period, that is just peanuts, since most of the resources allocated to the fight against organized crime and street gangs were reallocated to public safety and the fight against terrorism, particularly RCMP resources. That funding may give law enforcement some breathing room, but it does not constitute major progress.

I would like to digress for a moment. On April 20, 2015, before the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence, CSIS confirmed that, in the past four months, approximately 25 more Canadians have gone to join armed groups in Iraq and Syria. That represents a 50% increase in such cases. Let us not forget that, in October 2014, 145 individuals had gone to join such groups, so the situation has not improved. On the contrary, there has been an increase in the number of these cases.

The budget does not provide for any investments in prevention for families and youth or any investments in research. We learned that the Kanishka project will not be renewed, which is unfortunate. It

will also not be replaced by another research program. There is nothing of the sort in the Conservative budget.

Meanwhile, there is also nothing in this budget for disengagement, or what is commonly referred to as deradicalization. I am very skeptical about our prisons. I am wondering whether there are actually programs in place to deradicalize inmates who became radicalized either in prison or before they arrived. That is another problem that is not addressed.

This budget allocates \$2 million to the Security Intelligence Review Committee. Thus, Bill C-51 gives more powers to CSIS, but not more responsibility. That is very worrisome in a free and democratic society.

On the one hand, the operations of the Security Intelligence Review Committee should be revised, primarily to put a stop to partisan appointments and to base appointments on merit instead. On the other hand, \$2 million is not all that much. The real question we should be asking ourselves is whether this committee is doing what it is supposed to do, and that is overseeing CSIS. I do not have an answer, I am just wondering.

There is also the matter of money invested in national defence. The budget allocates \$360.3 million just for the mission in Iraq and Syria. If we were instead to invest that money in prevention, just imagine the number of young people and families whose suffering we could alleviate and the number of radicalized youth we could prevent from leaving for Iraq or Syria.

• (1700)

Let us look at another figure: \$13 million to \$14 million spent on advertising this budget. Imagine how much work we could do on prevention and disengagement here in Canada with \$13 million or \$14 million. No, the government prefers to invest that money in advertising and go to war in Iraq. I wanted to emphasize that.

As far as health is concerned, we see a major loss for the provinces. In this budget, the health transfer is capped at 3% a year. This is clearly going to put pressure on the provinces.

The government already made cuts of nearly \$30 billion over 10 years in health transfers during the renewal of 10-year agreement for 2014-24, which represents a loss of approximately \$800 million a year for Quebec.

The NDP is the only party that is saying that it will restore the former calculations for health transfers.

As far as people 57 or under are concerned, the Conservatives still reject any suggestion to increase Canada pension plan benefits and of course, Quebec pension plan benefits, but that is another story. It is also staying the course on pushing back the age of retirement from 65 to 67.

This means that people who were born in April 1958 or after will see their right to retire gradually pushed back. They will not be treated like other Canadians born before that date, which is totally unfair in my opinion.

The Budget

The NDP knows that we must rescind this decision to push back the age of retirement. The age of retirement should be 65, not 67. People have worked hard enough in their lifetime. It is high time that they rested, did what they love and received the money to which they are entitled.

The other interesting thing in this budget, and the NDP can be commended for contributing to this, is that the Conservatives finally responded to the request to lower mandatory minimum withdrawals from registered retirement income funds.

I could go on, but I will leave the floor to my dear colleague.

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Ahuntsic for her speech, which touched on a number of very interesting topics.

However, I cannot help but come back to the topic of TFSA's, since unfortunately, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice gave an unsatisfactory answer to my question.

This morning, at the Standing Committee on Finance, the Parliamentary Budget Officer's team made it clear that TFSA's essentially are not meeting the objective of encouraging people to save. On the contrary, the assistant parliamentary budget officer, Mostafa Askari, clearly stated that, unfortunately, savings are simply being transferred from another instrument to a TFSA.

As a result, the billions of dollars in public money being spent to give people a break on their taxes constitutes a net loss, since it is not resulting in additional savings.

Could my colleague speak to the government's unfortunate misuse of public money?

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comment. Yes, I understand completely, especially since not everyone is in a position to save.

The purchasing power of the middle class is weak and is getting smaller and smaller. Costs are rising on everything, and people are struggling to make ends meet. Who can afford to put money—now up to \$10,000—in a TFSA?

This certainly benefits the wealthy and puts the least fortunate at a disadvantage. Money invested in these accounts is not taxable, so this is a way for people to avoid paying taxes.

We are not opposed to saving. However, there needs to be some fairness in all of this.

I find it unfortunate that this budget once again favours the wealthy, whether we are talking about income splitting or TFSA's.

What about seniors, for example, who unfortunately did not get their fair share? What about the poor and affordable housing?

We see absolutely nothing about this in the budget.

• (1705)

[English]

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise and participate in debate on budget 2015. I take a nuanced approach with respect to examination of the document, unlike the official parties that stake out strong,

unequivocal positions. The government, of course, thinks this is the greatest thing since sliced bread and the opposition takes a much different position regarding all the negative aspects of it. I take a nuanced approach. There are some good aspects in budget 2015 and there are some provisions in it that I am not quite so excited about.

There are very few surprises. I could have written this speech several weeks ago. All of the major provisions of the budget had been leaked out in one form or another. That is unfortunate. Members of Parliament are owed that the budget be revealed to them prior to it being revealed to the public through media in fancy photo op situations. Also, the budget, entitled "Strong Leadership" actually does not look very much like a budget.

We all do budgets. When I do my family's budget, or my office budget, or even the upcoming political campaign budget, it is simply a matter of estimating revenues from various sources and then deducting estimated expenditures, based on past spending commitments and history. It is an income statement. It is a balance sheet. It is leading to either a surplus or a deficit. Although there are some charts and graphs in here, it is more of a narrative. It is a speech. It is an explanation of why we should like it. That is why my ultimate assessment of budget 2015 is that it is more of a political document than an economic statement.

To give credit where it is due, after seven consecutive deficit budgets, including the single largest deficit in Canadian history, the \$56-billion budgetary deficit in 2008, budget 2015, at least on paper, shows a surplus. I congratulate the government for doing so. However, in order to come out in black ink the government was forced to sell some assets, including its remaining stock in General Motors and dip into its contingency fund and also borrow from the EI surplus. When disposing of assets to balance a budget it can be done in the short term, but that is not a long-term sound fiscal policy, because eventually we will run out of assets.

For some time, I have been asking the government for balanced budget legislation. We are assured, both by a press conference that the Minister of Finance had three weeks before the budget was tabled and also in the document, that balanced budget legislation is coming. I look forward to it. I look forward to having a debate on that, because although there are some limitations and some controversy concerning balanced budget legislation, I think it is important. Canadians have to live within their means and they expect no less for their government.

The real purpose of balancing this budget was to allow the government to implement its much heralded targeted tax relief that it promised. I also promised I would do it, because I was part of the government caucus in 2011. We campaigned on the promise that once the budget was balanced we would bring in targeted tax relief, most notably income splitting. Therefore, I congratulate the government for achieving that benchmark, that it will in fact be able to bring in tax relief. I support those aspects of the budget because I support tax relief generally. I believe, as many Conservatives do, that taxes are too high in this country and therefore it is difficult to vote against a provision that would lessen someone's tax burden.

The Budget

With that being said, I continually question the continued complication of our tax code. The Fraser Institute, which many individuals on the other side will be familiar with, tabled a report just last week stating that the cost of tax compliance in the country is approaching \$6 billion in terms of the cost to Canadians for hiring accountants and tax lawyers and spending their own time, which is valuable, poring through documents and receipts, attempting to save a few hundred dollars that are owed to them in tax credits.

• (1710)

I am always curious about why the government targets boutique tax credits, as opposed to what would be much simpler, which is simplifying the tax code by removing many, if not most or all, of the boutique tax credits and simply lowering the tax rate for all Canadians. That would be fairer and it would reduce to almost zero the estimated \$6 billion that Canadians now spend in boutique tax credits.

We know why the government likes boutique tax credits, just as all governments like boutique tax credits. It is because they are able to micro target certain demographics and certain aspects of the electorate that they hope to curry electoral favour from and with.

As some of my colleagues might know, Alberta is in the midst of a provincial election, which is suddenly competitive due to the unpopularity of the budget that was tabled by the Progressive Conservative Government of Alberta approximately one month ago. That budget showed a huge deficit, some modest tax increases, delayed infrastructure announcements, and some minor cuts in front-line services. However, this budget is the opposite of a politically toxic budget. This budget is politically quite clever because it shows a balance. It would allow target tax cuts to key electoral demographics, such as seniors, small business and families with children; and then it offers some relatively large spending promises to other targeted groups, such as those who want public transit and military procurement. Those promises are back loaded and would not take effect until 2017 and thereafter.

It is a very clever document, and I congratulate the government on how clever it is, because it allows them to show a balanced budget while still making expensive promises, but the money would not go out of the door for another two years and would not, therefore, affect its timely surplus, thereby allowing it to balance the budget and bring in tax breaks.

The last thing that I want to say, if I have time, is that it continues to have too many industrial subsidies in it, such as the \$100 million for the automotive supplier innovation program. There is too much targeted tax relief and subsidizing. It would be much simpler and much fairer if the government simply lowered the tax rates for all Canadians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Like the other Speaker, I will try to divide the time for each of the two last members of Parliament. We are going to have one question under questions and comments.

The hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thank you for your generosity.

I agree with my hon. colleague that this is a clever budget insofar as we consider smoke and mirrors to be clever. In that respect, it is clever. I do agree with his demographic targeted cutting of boutique tax credits.

What I was interested in knowing is whether the hon. member is concerned about the built-in structural, fiscal deficit caused by the initial HST cuts, which have basically forced the government into this smoke and mirrors bogus balanced budget, where it has to mug the contingency fund and prematurely sell off assets in order to get to the bogus balanced budget.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Mr. Speaker, the short answer is yes, I am concerned. As I indicated in my comments, in order to balance this budget, there was a bit of a shell game going on. The EI surplus was depleted. The contingency was paid down. Assets were sold, including the General Motors stock. It allowed the government to balance its budget on paper and, therefore, implement its long promised tax relief, but that strategy cannot be a medium- or, certainly, long-term strategy because we will run out of assets.

Yes, we do have structural issues. We have had deficits for the last seven years, ever since the recession of 2008. The government is going to have to find revenue sources to replace the two-point cut in the GST or other targeted tax relief that it has offered in this budget and previous ones.

The hon. member is quite right. Yes, this budget is balanced, but the next one may not be because there may not be a contingency fund or assets. There will not be assets in General Motors, and there may not be comparable assets to sell to make up for the revenue that has been otherwise lost.

• (1715)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. It being 5:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the amendment now before the House.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Call in the members.

The Budget

● (1755)

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

*(Division No. 380)***YEAS**

Members

Adams	Allen (Welland)
Ashton	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Bélangier	Bellavance
Bennett	Benskin
Bevington	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Borg	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Brisson	Brosseau
Byrne	Caron
Casey	Cash
Chan	Charlton
Chicoine	Choquette
Christopherson	Cleary
Côté	Cotler
Crowder	Cullen
Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Day	Dewar
Dion	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Dubourg
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseault
Easter	Eyking
Footé	Fortin
Freeman	Fry
Garneau	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Grogg	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hsu
Hughes	Jones
Julian	Kellway
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Latendresse	Laverdière
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Énard)
Leslie	Liu
MacAulay	Mai
Marston	Martin
Masse	Mathysen
May	McCallum
McGuinty	MacKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Mourani	Mulcair
Murray	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Papillon
Péclet	Pilon
Plamondon	Quach
Rafferty	Rankin
Ravignat	Raynault
Regan	Rousseau
Saganash	Sandhu
Scarpaleggia	Scott
Sellah	Sgro
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	
Sitsabaiesan	St-Denis
Stewart	Sullivan
Toone	Tremblay
Trudeau	Valeriote — 124

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy	Adler
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler

Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Armstrong
Aspin	Barlow
Bateman	Benoit
Bergen	Bezan
Blaney	Block
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
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Devolin	Dreeshen
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Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Gill
Glover	Goguen
Goldring	Goodyear
Gourde	Grewal
Harper	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hayes
Hillyer	Hoback
Holder	James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Lebel
Leaf	Leitch
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Maguire	Mayes
McColeman	McLeod
Menegakis	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Nicholson	Norlock
Obhrai	O'Neill Gordon
Opitz	O'Toole
Paradis	Payne
Perkins	Poilievre
Preston	Raitt
Rajotte	Rathgeber
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Rickford
Ritz	Saxton
Schellenberger	Seeback
Shea	Shipley
Shory	Smith
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Trost
Trottier	Truppe
Uppal	Valcourt
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	Wilks
Williamson	Wong
Woodworth	Yelich
Young (Oakville)	Young (Vancouver South)
Yurdiga	Zimmer — 152

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the amendment defeated.

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

The House resumed from April 27 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion of the member for Ottawa South relating to the business of supply.

• (1805)

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

(Division No. 381)

YEAS

Members

Adams	Allen (Welland)
Ashton	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Bélangier	Bellavance
Bennett	Benskin
Bevington	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Borg	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Brisson	Brosseau
Byrne	Caron
Casey	Cash
Chan	Charlton
Chicoine	Choquette
Christopherson	Cleary
Côté	Cotler
Crowder	Cullen
Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Day	Dewar
Dion	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Dubourg
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseault
Easter	Eyking
Footé	Fortin
Freeman	Fry
Garneau	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Grogulé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hsu
Hughes	Jones
Julian	Kellway
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Latendresse	Laverdière
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leslie	Liu
MacAulay	Mai
Marston	Martin
Masse	Mathysen
May	McCallum
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Mourani	Mulcair
Murray	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Papillon
Péclet	Pilon
Plamondon	Quach
Rafferty	Rankin
Rathgeber	Ravignat
Raynault	Regan
Rousseau	Saganash
Sandhu	Scarpaleggia
Scott	Sellah
Sgro	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind- sor)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Sitsabaesan
St-Denis	Stewart
Stoffer	Sullivan

Toone
Trudeau

Ablonczy	Tremblay
Aglukkaq	Valeriote— 126
Albrecht	
Allison	
Ambrose	
Anderson	
Aspin	
Bateman	
Bergen	
Blaney	
Boughen	
Breitkreuz	
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	
Butt	
Calkins	
Carmichael	
Chisu	
Clarke	
Crockatt	
Davidson	
Devolin	
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	
Eglinski	
Fantino	
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	
Fletcher	
Gallant	
Glover	
Goldring	
Gourde	
Harper	
Hawn	
Hillyer	
Holder	
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	
Kennedy (Calgary Southeast)	
Kerr	
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	
Lauzon	
Leaf	
Lemieux	
Lizon	
Lukiwski	
MacKay (Central Nova)	
Maguire	
McColeman	
Menegakis	
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Nicholson	
Obhrai	
Opitz	
Paradis	
Perkins	
Preston	
Rajotte	
Rempel	
Rickford	
Saxton	
Seeback	
Shiple	
Smith	
Sorenson	
Strahl	
Tilson	
Trost	
Truppe	
Valcourt	
Van Loan	
Wallace	
Warkentin	
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wilks	
Wong	
Yelich	
Young (Vancouver South)	

*Business of Supply***NAYS**

Members

Adler
Albas
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambler
Anders
Armstrong
Barlow
Benoit
Bezan
Block
Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Calandra
Cannan
Carrie
Chong
Clement
Daniel
Dechert
Dreeschen
Dykstra
Falk
Fast
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Galipeau
Gill
Goguen
Goodyear
Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hayes
Hoback
James
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Lebel
Leitch
Leung
Lobb
Lunney
MacKenzie
Mayes
McLeod
Miller
Norlock
O'Neill Gordon
O'Toole
Payne
Poillievre
Raitt
Reid
Richards
Ritz
Schellenberger
Shea
Shory
Sopuck
Stanton
Sweet
Toet
Trotter
Uppal
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Warawa
Watson
Williamson
Woodworth
Young (Oakville)
Yurdiga

Private Members' Business

Zimmer — 151

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

It being 6:11 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business, as listed on today's order paper.

* * *

CITIZEN VOTING ACT

BILL C-50—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I must advise that agreements could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the second reading stage of Bill C-50, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act.

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

Some hon. members: Shame.

* * *

ANTI-TERRORISM ACT, 2015

BILL C-51—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I must advise that agreements could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the report stage and third reading stage of Bill C-51, an act to enact the Security of Canada Information Sharing Act and the Secure Air Travel Act, to amend the Criminal Code, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service Act and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts.

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

Some hon. members: Shame.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

●(1810)

[English]

NATIONAL ACTION PLAN TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP) moved:

Motion No. 444

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should develop, in collaboration with the provinces, territories, civil society and First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples and their representatives, a coordinated National Action Plan to Address Violence Against Women which would include: (a) initiatives to address

socio-economic factors contributing to violence against women; (b) policies to prevent violence against women and policies to respond to survivors of violence; (c) benchmarks for measuring progress based on the collection of data on levels of violence against women over time; (d) independent research on emerging issues that relate to violence against women; (e) a national public inquiry into missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls; (f) strategies that address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of different communities including specific attention to Aboriginal women, women with disabilities, women from minority groups and young women; (g) participation by community and other civil society organizations, including support for those organizations to participate in the implementation of the national action plan; and (h) human and financial resources earmarked specifically to carry out the program of action set by the plan.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured today to rise to support Motion No. 444, a motion to create a national action plan to address violence against women.

[Translation]

It is a privilege to move such a motion in the House.

[English]

It is my great privilege to sponsor this motion, which is the only meaningful legislation to address violence against women that Canada has seen in decades. Now the need for action is urgent. The next steps are clearly laid out by feminist anti-violence advocates across our country. They are asking for a national, coordinated, comprehensive action plan that works in partnership with provincial, territorial, and indigenous governments.

It is my sincere hope that, with this motion, we can resolve together to set Canada on the path toward sustained and substantive equality for women and girls, because we know that without freedom from violence, women cannot achieve equality and, without gender equality, women will always remain vulnerable to violence.

I would like to begin my speech by thanking the advocates, front-line workers, survivors, and community members who have taken time out from their extremely busy schedules and busy lives to meet with me as I travelled from region to region over the past three years. These remarkable people have dedicated themselves to confronting the violence women face every single day, and they deserve honour and gratitude from the House and from all Canadians.

It is due to the extraordinary efforts of this chronically underfunded and under-resourced sector that women find safety, support, and justice. While the needs of women vary quite a bit between regions and communities, the majority of people I met with had a very singular message to deliver to their federal government: violence against women is a crisis in Canada and it is getting worse, not better.

This crisis is fed by systemic gender-based discrimination and women's inequality. Likewise, the way forward for our government is to empower women to address that inequality. To do nothing is to perpetuate it. To do too little is to perpetuate it. To ignore the voices of survivors, family members, evidence-based researchers, and front-line service providers who know what Canada can be doing right now is to willfully neglect the safety of women in our country.

What would a national action plan do to change the landscape of anti-violence services for women? Ann Decter, the director of advocacy and public policies for YWCA Canada says:

Private Members' Business

Canada needs a national action plan on violence against women that will set national standards for prevention, support services, legal services and access to justice and crucial social policies, such as access to safe, affordable housing. A National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women needs to be part of the plan. M-444 provides for all of this, and as such, has our full support.

Not only has the federal government not done enough to recognize, treat, and prevent violence against women, but for the past several decades under the Liberals and the Conservatives, the governments have adopted policy that actively places vulnerable women further at risk.

For example, when the Liberals came to power in 1993, they cut off federal investment in new social housing projects. In 1996, the Liberal government announced the end of the national affordable housing program. By the late nineties, it had created a serious housing shortage that has directly resulted in the increased vulnerability of women who must leave situations of domestic violence. Indeed, a lack of affordable housing is the number one reason why women cannot functionally escape the violence they face.

Needless to say, the Conservatives have continued to abandon their responsibility to deal with housing problems, and it is Canadian women who continue to bear the brunt of this burden.

When the Liberal government downloaded legal aid onto the provinces and cut off all earmarked funding, it created conditions in which women now find it nearly impossible to seek justice and safety through the courts.

When the Conservatives elected to forbid funding to any research or advocacy, Canada fell into a state of having little to no data regarding violence against women. This is a very serious problem, and only a national action plan could begin to solve it.

• (1815)

Kate MacInturff, one of Canada's foremost feminist voices writes:

The difficulty of collecting data about violence against women has been a barrier to progress in ending that violence. However, the data that does exist tells us three things very clearly: this problem is big, it comes at a high cost, and we are making little or no progress in putting a stop to it.

It was the Liberals who were at the helm when poverty conditions on first nations grew worse and worse. Under a majority government, funding for first nations education on reserve was cut. The Conservatives have done nothing to fix this gap. The Auditor General reports that schools on reserve are underfunded by 30% compared with schools off reserve.

We now see indigenous women facing extreme rates of violence that correspond directly to extreme rates of poverty, housing shortages, and a lack of economic opportunities. Make no mistake, the systemic and long-standing underfunding of first nations is a form of racial discrimination against indigenous peoples.

Dr. Dawn Harvard, the interim president of the Native Women's Association of Canada wrote to me and said:

It is crucial that a National Action Plan assess the root causes in order to address Violence Against Women.

The fact that many Aboriginal women were killed by someone who shares their ethnicity is something that holds true for most victims of homicide, regardless of their ethnic origin. Therefore, we cannot write off this issue, by saying it is Aboriginal men killing Aboriginal women, and therefore, is not a federal

responsibility or there is not a need for an inquiry or any of these kinds of excuses that seems to be inferred.

We also know that there continues to be non-Aboriginal men that are extremely violent toward Aboriginal women, and that Aboriginal women experience more severe forms of violence by these offenders than non-Aboriginal women so there continues to be racialized hatred and devaluation exhibited against Aboriginal women and this needs to be addressed.

Dr. Harvard went on to say:

A National Action Plan can also create a mechanism for investigations into misconduct and discrimination within the criminal justice system and police forces and needs to establish a mechanism for investigating allegations of misconduct or discrimination within the federal, provincial or territorial components of the criminal justice system, and hold accountable those entities who commit acts of misconduct or discrimination.

M-444 is very clear: a national action plan to address violence against women must include a national public inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women. Almost every governing body in Canada, along with the Assembly of First Nations, the Native Women's Association of Canada, and many indigenous people, are in agreement that a national inquiry, done properly, is necessary to treat the root causes this tragedy. Only the Conservatives disagree, and they alone stand in opposition to real, substantive action.

Meanwhile women continue to disappear and women continue to be killed. Where I'm from, in northern Manitoba, every single community has been affected by the tragedy of missing and murdered indigenous women. The tragic cases of women from our riding, including Lorna Blacksmith, Leah Anderson, and Tina Fontaine, who were murdered in the last few years, have led many Manitobans to speak out and organize. The story and bravery of Rinelle Harper inspired action back home and across the country. For me and for our north, this fight is personal to all of us, and we will not stop until there are no more missing and murdered indigenous women in our country.

While denying the call for a national inquiry and litigating against those who seek to correct funding discrimination against first nations children, this Conservative government repeatedly ignores calls from the UN and other international human rights organizations to take action to address the systemic discrimination, racism, and violence endured by indigenous women and their families.

The relationship between Canada and first nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples is now in a state of crisis. My colleagues in the NDP, including our leader, know there is a different way forward. We are committed to a national inquiry. We are committed to a national action plan. We are committed to a housing strategy that includes indigenous communities both on and off reserve, and we are committed to forming a nation-to-nation relationship that will take all of us forward.

Private Members' Business

● (1820)

For me, as the member of Parliament for Churchill and the aboriginal affairs critic for the NDP, this is not a theoretical pledge but the first steps toward healing and reconciliation. When we speak about violence against women, it is crucial that we understand the intersectionality that can compound the risk of violence, and advocates across the country know this to be the case every day.

Although violence happens to all women, regardless of class, race, sexuality, or gender identity, it is important to recognize that inequality in all its forms can increase violence in the lives of women. The most effective way to end violence against women is to address the root causes of inequality. Canadian women earn 72% of what men earn and work one-third of minimum wage jobs. We need to address the economic inequality and the feminization of poverty that we are seeing across our country.

Racialized women are often the target of discrimination, stereotyping, and harassment. We need to address racism in Canada.

Many immigrant women are facing isolation and lack of access to anti-violence services. Women are made increasingly vulnerable to abuse when their immigration status is tied to their work visas or their marriage status. We must address the violence faced by immigrants, refugees, and temporary foreign workers who are women.

We must confront transphobia. Earlier today, outside on the lawn of Parliament Hill, trans folks and allies gathered to voice their outrage that the current government will allow Bill C-279 to be destroyed by an unelected Senate. Transgender women face some of the highest rates of violence in the country. Of all marginalized peoples, trans folk immediately require the explicit right to live free of discrimination.

I am proud of the work we have done in the NDP. We have repeatedly brought this bill forward and will continue to do so until this vital piece of human rights legislation is enshrined once and for all.

Disabled women face disproportionate rates of violence. Queer women, women who are lesbians, face disproportionate levels of violence. That intersectional understanding of the violence they face is critical in moving forward with a national action plan.

After speaking to hundreds of women and advocates about this motion, I can say that the one point I heard repeatedly was that anti-violence services cannot continue to function with few or no resources.

The Canadian Network of Women's Shelters & Transition Houses recently published its 2015 shelter voices survey. It found that, on a single day, shelters in Canada welcomed 122 new women residents and 81 child residents. However, on that same day shelters were forced—and are forced—to turn away 302 women and 221 children seeking shelter, due to a lack of resources. It is heartbreaking and infuriating for the service providers. I have been told first-hand from multiple sources that most front-line staff are actively subsidizing the government with free labour.

Let us be clear. This is about the money. Governments choose to prioritize funding, and the violence against women sector is simply

underfunded and has been for decades. It has not been prioritized by Liberal or Conservative governments. In the meantime, we are the ones giving voice to the need for a national action plan.

This issue is as personal as it is political for me, my colleagues, and my community. We have seen women, feminists, across the country make history to draw attention to the violence they face on campuses, on social media, in the workplace, and on our streets. Parliament must sit up and pay attention to the conversation women are having on the ground, in classrooms, online, and everywhere. It is our right as women to demand action from the government, and it is our responsibility as parliamentarians to respond and take action.

● (1825)

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I heard over and over again talk about the root causes of inequality. During committee review of Bill C-36, we heard many compelling testimonies from a broad cross-section of people impacted by prostitution and human trafficking, and none more so than aboriginal women and children. There is a clear link between murdered and missing aboriginal women and prostitution and human trafficking.

During its testimony, the Native Women's Association of Canada was clear that it wanted Canada to target the buyers of sexual services, the men who buy sex from vulnerable aboriginal women and youth. In fact, NWAC stated that it wanted the bill to pass to tackle the demand and said that criminalizing pimps and buyers would be a huge step.

When we talk about the root causes of inequality, tackling the demand for prostitution and human trafficking is part of the steps we need to take to end the travesty of murdered and missing women. Why did the members, at every step of the bill, vote against it?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I want to bring the focus back to the need for a national action plan. A national action plan is necessary because of the reality that too many women, including indigenous women, in Canada face. It has been appalling to see a government seek to make women, including sex workers in our country, more vulnerable through its dangerous legislation.

If the government really wanted to act to put an end to violence against indigenous women, or any women, it would begin by saying yes to calling for a national inquiry. It would begin by investing in housing and eradicating poverty. It would begin by building respectful relationships with indigenous communities and respectful relationships with those who work so hard to empower women across the country.

Sadly, the government is doing nothing. All the while, more Canadian women are placed in more and more difficult and vulnerable situations. It is time to act.

Private Members' Business

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, violence against women is a very important issue that we all recognize needs to be given a great deal more attention. I am a bit disappointed in a number of the remarks that portray the Liberals and Conservatives as bad, yet the NDP is on a super high horse. The member needs to get off the super high horse and reflect on the province of Manitoba.

If we look at the serious root causes on a per capita base that lead to violence against women, it is no higher in blame on a political party or a government than the Government of Manitoba. Examples of that would be children unnecessarily being put in jail and issues related to CFS.

If we are to come to grips with the issue of violence against women, we not only need to see a strong federal government, we also need to see a government that is committed to working with provinces and other stakeholders to have that national action plan. Would she not acknowledge the importance of that?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, if the member had listened to my speech, it was more of a history lesson of the way previous Liberal governments had served to marginalize indigenous communities in our country.

I invite the member to come and visit the northern part of our province and see schools that are mould infested, schools where people do not have enough textbooks to use, where there are not enough specialized teachers to work with the kids. He should visit houses where there are 17 people to a house. This did not just start in the last five, six or seven years. This has gone on for decades and it has been Liberal governments that have failed our indigenous peoples.

Let us bring it back to violence. We know that one of the greatest factors in the vulnerability of women is poverty. Therefore, when there are extreme rates of poverty, in fact, third world living conditions that exist in too many first nations, in Manitoba and across the country, then we have the high rates of violence.

I hope the member and his party learn from the kind of leadership that we have shown in the NDP. We need a national action plan and comprehensive investment. We also need to learn from the history, including the history of the Liberals, that has served us all so poorly.

• (1830)

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am so thankful for this opportunity, because I have such good news for the member across the way.

Over and over again, I have heard her say that we have need for an action plan to address family violence and violent crimes against aboriginal women and girls. It just so happens that in my hand is an action plan to address family violence and violent crimes against aboriginal women and girls. It is an excellent action plan. It addresses a lot of the issues that were brought forward not only in her speech, but in speeches in Parliament throughout the duration of this discussion.

When we talk about an action plan to address family violence, there are many factors to it. I want to go over a few aspects of it, because it is here.

All the members opposite have to do is simply support the people who are trying to implement the action plan. In the plan, there is a five-year action plan to address family violence and violent crimes against aboriginal women and girls, and it is under three pillars.

The first is preventing violence by supporting community level solutions. That talks about housing, schools, counselling for victims and supporting aboriginal victims with appropriate services. It talks about the increased shelters that we have across the country for victims of violence. Protecting aboriginal women and girls by investing in shelters and continuing to improve Canada's law enforcement and justice systems is integral to this action plan for which the member opposite has called. All she has to do is read it.

The action plan is the Government of Canada's response to the recommendations of the Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women. We keep hearing about how we should have a national inquiry. I, too, have visited many reserves and aboriginal communities across the country. I took with me a lot of the reports that had been already been done. Forty reports have been done, examining the issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women. There has been study after study done. We know what the problem is. Through this action plan, we have taken action to improve the situation and the violence against women, particularly aboriginal women.

On top of this, which is so important, is the Victims Bill of Rights Act. Often, when an aboriginal woman, or any woman, has become a victim, she goes into a courtroom and she does not get information. She does not get protection. She is not able to participate against her perpetrator or even have a right to restitution. Under our government, this has all changed. Now women have the right to information about the criminal justice system and the available services and programs. They have a right to protection. They have a right to have their security and privacy considered at all stages of the criminal justice process and to have reasonable measures to protect them from intimidation and retaliation.

I have been in courtrooms, watching victims give testimony as their perpetrators were intimidating them with a cold stare, by shaking their head, or with all of this innuendo in front of them. The victims have a right to protection against this kind of thing. They have the right to participation. They have a right to convey their views about decisions to be made by criminal justice professionals and have them considered at various stages of the criminal justice process. They have a right to that. They are the victims, and our government has brought that in.

These women have a right to restitution. They have a right to have the court consider making a restitution order for offences where it is easy to calculate the financial side of it. The financial side of it is only a very small part. It is what happens to them, the post-traumatic stress disorder, the fear and all those things.

Our government has addressed all these things in this action plan.

Private Members' Business

● (1835)

The is Canada's action plan. Members across the House can embrace it. They can do something about it. They can find out about the victims' fund and protecting aboriginal girls, about supporting shelters on reserve and the DNA-based missing persons index. There are so many things in this action plan that cover virtually all the questions, queries and demands I heard this evening.

On February 20, the government announced a 10-year \$100 million investment to prevent, detect and combat family violence and child abuse as part of the Government of Canada's commitment to stand up for victims. It is not only people in the House, but it is people like Sheldon Kennedy, who created the Sheldon Kennedy Child Advocacy Centre. Victims are brought in to his advocacy centre, which is right beside the children's hospital. The police are also housed in that unit, as are the social workers and the support systems for those children.

It does not matter whether they are aboriginal children, Polish children or French children, any child who is abused, as well as victims of human trafficking, can be a part of that service. It is one of the best centres I have ever seen, I would dare say, the best in the world.

Under our government, the investment would support victims of violence through a multifaceted approach to better equip health professionals with the information and training they need to support victims of domestic violence.

Today, in my office, I had a victim tell me about her experience going to a hospital and how terrible it was because the health professionals were not equipped with information and training, which they now will be under our government. The health and well-being of victims of violence as well as enhanced access to mental health counselling for victims of violence is included in this plan.

Post-traumatic stress disorder is one issue that we see more and more with victims of violence. Under our government, under this very special action plan to combat violence against women, access to mental health counselling for victims of violence is there. It is very important.

There is also the support and enhancement for organizations and partnerships that provide integrated services to victims of violence.

On April 1 of this same year, our government began implementation of its action plan to address family violence. The action plan takes immediate and concrete action to prevent violence, not only to be a reactionary piece of it or a problem-solving piece of it, and to support victims and protect aboriginal women and girls through new and ongoing commitments, totalling approximately \$200 million over five years.

When I hear about a lack of funding, our government has taken giant steps toward stopping human trafficking and violence against women and children. There is new funding of \$25 million over five years beginning April 1 this year. That is really strong. There is ongoing funding of \$158.7 million over five years, beginning in 2015, for shelters and family violence prevention activities. That is very important. It is something that has not been here. It is written out and implemented so clearly.

We talk about the economic security of women. An allocation of \$5 million has been included for dedicated resources through the Status of Women Canada to improve the economic security of aboriginal women and promote their participation in leadership and decision-making.

This is a phenomenal action plan. No longer do members have to call for a national action plan, we have an action plan. It is right here with all the components that can be used, embraced and supported by all members of the House.

● (1840)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased today to speak in support of the motion put forward by my colleague from the NDP, the member for Churchill, regarding the critical issue of violence against women.

The motion calls for the development of a national action plan to address violence against women and sets out a series of key components that must be included in such a plan. In hearing from the member for Kildonan—St. Paul, it is quite clear that the Conservative government has no idea what an action plan is supposed to look like. I thank the member from the NDP for actually laying out what some of the things might be, including the essential component of partners that would do this with us, instead of somebody sitting in a den somewhere writing an action plan, like clearly happened with the trafficking action plan that is the joke of the world.

As the chair of the Liberal women's caucus and as the Liberal Party's critic for aboriginal affairs, this is an issue of particular relevance to my parliamentary responsibilities, but also has a huge resonance with my previous life as a family doctor at Women's College Hospital, which set up the first sexual assault care centre, and every year on December 6 honours the lives of the women who have been lost in Ontario at the hands of a spouse or former spouse.

This is an issue that cuts across socio-economic status, cultures and religions, and Liberals believe that all must work together to end it. I truly believe this could and should be an issue that cuts across party lines and I am disappointed that the member for Churchill continues to try to turn this into a partisan issue. It cannot be that.

In August 2013, the Minister of Health spoke at a meeting of the Canadian Medical Association, where she announced she would make ending family violence the theme of her tenure. She repeated a similar message at the recent meeting of the CMA in April 2014. The motion offers the minister and her government an opportunity to match those words with real action.

Every year in Canada, violence and abuse drive over 100,000 women and children out of their homes and into shelters. In Canada, women continue to outnumber men nine to one as victims of assault by spouses or partners and girls between the ages of 12 and 15 are at the greatest risk of sexual assault by a family member.

Private Members' Business

As appalling as these statistics are, the level of family violence faced by indigenous women and girls is even more shocking. It is really important that the government understand that the rate of indigenous women being killed by a spouse or former spouse is less than in the non-indigenous community. Therefore, I have been particularly appalled by the message being given by the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development as though it means that somehow these women who are missing and murdered are less important.

Indigenous women and girls are dramatically more likely to be victims of homicides or to go missing in Canada. Last year's RCMP report identified almost 1,200 indigenous women and girls who have gone missing or been murdered since 1980. Further, while only 4% of women in Canada are indigenous, this demographic accounted for 8% of female homicide victims in 1984 and a staggering 23% by 2012. The crisis for indigenous women has been getting worse and now almost one in four female homicide victims in Canada is indigenous.

As the Liberal Party of Canada's aboriginal affairs critic and a longtime advocate for such a public inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, I would like to speak specifically about this part of the motion we are debating today.

I have my own stand-alone motion calling for a national inquiry that will be debated in the House in the coming weeks and I hope the member for Churchill will help me with that. The Prime Minister's insensitive comments last summer that we should not view this as a sociological phenomenon and his shocking admission during one of his year-end interviews that missing and murdered indigenous women and girls are not high on his radar provide a disturbing and disappointing window into how he views this national disgrace.

The truth is that only a national inquiry would have the credibility, scope and resources to address the systemic problems underlying the violence, provide the accountability to ensure implementation of its recommendations, and bring justice and reconciliation to the victims and their families.

• (1845)

The Prime Minister's stubborn refusal to call a national public inquiry is in stark contrast to the overwhelming consensus that one is needed. Grieving families, indigenous leaders, victims' advocates, civil society, the international community, and every provincial and territorial premier have all urged the government to call a national public inquiry. It is time to call that public inquiry now.

What has been the response of the Conservative government to ongoing violence against women? The government consistently dismisses the importance of prevention and refuses to address and adequately resource the programs that are in place to deal with this tragic issue.

The Conservative government campaigns about cracking down on violence against women and girls, citing tough-on-crime measures like eliminating house arrest for sexual assault or toughening penalties for the trafficking of date rape drugs, or as we have heard just now, a DNA databank, which is after the woman is dead. What women and families in this country want to hear is how we are going to prevent and stop this epidemic in both the indigenous and non-

indigenous communities. While some of these measures may be positive, they do not replace a comprehensive action plan and amount to little more than tinkering at the margins of a national crisis.

Even more appalling was the government's attempt to hide its inaction by repackaging a laundry list of existing inadequate funding and programs as a new, what the member for Kildonan—St. Paul called “very special”, action plan for family violence and violent crimes against aboriginal women and girls last fall.

Unfortunately, the current government has stubbornly refused to work with its partners, the provinces and territories, civil society and aboriginal leaders and communities, to develop and implement a comprehensive plan to deal with violence against women.

In 2008, the United Nations released a UN Framework for Action, which identified five key outcomes as benchmarks for the campaign to be achieved by all countries by this year, 2015. It is reprehensible that the government has rejected the UN recommendation to adopt and implement a multi-sectoral national plan of action that emphasizes prevention and is adequately resourced.

Unlike Canada's federal government, the national Australian government demonstrated the leadership to work with its partners, state governments and local communities, to develop a comprehensive 12-year national plan to reduce violence against women and their children. Released in 2011, this multi-jurisdictional and comprehensive approach is actually four action plans which represent distinct phases, and each builds on each other over 12 years. They are designed so that the Australian government and civil society can look back at what has been achieved and refocus subsequent action plans on what actions will make the most difference in the future.

This is the kind of long-term, properly resourced and co-operative approach that we must adopt here in Canada.

Today's motion offers an opportunity for all the parties in this House to come together and agree on a sensible and effective path forward. The motion clearly outlines what the necessary components of an effective action plan to end violence against women here in Canada must include.

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

Those elements include initiatives to address socio-economic factors contributing to violence against women; policies to prevent violence against women and policies to respond to survivors of violence; benchmarks for measuring progress based on the collection of data on levels of violence against women over time; independent research on emerging issues that relate to violence against women; a public inquiry; strategies that address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of different communities; participation by community and other organizations; and human and financial resources earmarked specifically to carry out the program of action set by the plan.

• (1850)

[English]

It is time for the government to replace the rhetoric about violence against women and girls with an effective and comprehensive action. This epidemic of violence must end and the Conservative government, which claims to be tough on crime and to stand up for victims of crime, cannot continue to ignore the ongoing national disgrace of violence against women.

I urge all members to support the motion.

[Translation]

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to support my colleague from Churchill's Motion No. 444 to develop a national action plan to address violence against women.

I congratulate the member for Churchill on her work and her dedication to fighting violence against women. She and so many others are doing inspiring work to tackle this problem.

The Canadian Network of Women's Shelters & Transition Houses defines violence against women as follows:

Violence against women is a form of gender-based discrimination, a manifestation of historical and systemic inequality between men and women, and the most widespread human rights violation in the world. It refers to any act, intention or threat of physical, sexual or psychological violence that results in the harm or suffering of women and girls, including restrictions on their freedom, safety and full participation in society. It is inflicted by intimate partners, caregivers, family members, guardians, strangers, co-workers, employers...and service providers. It occurs in the home, at work, in institutions and in our communities. [Violence against women affects all of us.] Women's experiences of violence are shaped by multiple forms of discrimination and [unfair] disadvantage, which intersect with race, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, immigrant and refugee status, age, and disability.

By refusing to address or even recognize the systemic nature of violence against women, the Conservative government's minister is perpetuating the situation. Women are still being subjected to the most violent manifestations of inequality simply because they are women. The federal government could help them, but it does not.

The Conservatives' record on violence against women is simply atrocious. The Conservatives' failure to act is nothing more than negligence, particularly when it comes to the intolerable rates of violence that aboriginal women experience.

Since they have been in power, the Conservatives have been blatantly attacking the equality of women in Canada. They did away with the court challenges program. They cut the budget of Status of

Women Canada by 70% and also took the word "equality" out of its mandate. They banned research and advocacy in the programs funded by that organization. They introduced a number of bills and motions against abortion. They passed regressive legislative measures with regard to income equality, measures that even went against the recommendations of experts. They refuse to allocate sufficient funding to combat violence against aboriginal women and conduct a national public inquiry, when everyone in Canada is calling for them to do so. They are blocking the NDP's bill on transgendered rights. They are refusing to allocate funding to development assistance and to abortion and family planning services, even in cases of forced marriage and rape committed as an act of war. They are constantly reducing funding for social programs, which harms all women. They are attacking the unions that protect good paying jobs for women and proposing programs, such as income splitting, that will reduce the number of working women, at the expense of a national child care program that would ensure the financial security of women.

This erosion of equality makes women more vulnerable to violence. Violence against women is systemic and widespread in Canada. It is a sociological phenomenon. The number of violent crimes is decreasing, but the number of rapes and sexual assaults remains stable. Women are 10 times more likely to be victims of sexual crimes and three times more likely to be victims of criminal harassment.

Whether they are at school, at work or at home, this is a reality that all women live with in one way or another, simply because they are women. It is an oppressive and systemic violence that affects half of our population.

Although violence harms all women, those who are dealing with multiple forms of oppression have more obstacles to overcome, and any solutions must recognize and take into account the thousands of oppressive forms that discrimination and marginalization can take.

• (1855)

We are living in a time when many disciplines are recognizing the effects of the inequality created by various systemic problems. The more oppression there is, the more vulnerabilities we see.

Aboriginal women, women from visible minorities, older women, LBTTQ women, and women with disabilities are the most affected to the extent that we might call them the most targeted populations. The intersectionality of oppression is very clear when we talk about violence against women.

Fully 67% of all Canadians say they personally know at least one woman who was the victim of sexual or physical assault, and in Canada 50% of all women experience at least one incident of physical or sexual violence by age 16.

Private Members' Business

Canada has no plan to combat violence against women. It is clear that this is a national problem and it is important to point out that most of these crimes are not reported. A national plan of action would provide a framework for consultation and for strengthening the systems that prevent and respond to violence against women. For this plan to work, there will have to be a consultation process with the people, organizations, communities and researchers who have worked tirelessly to put an end to violence against women. The call for a strategy is coming not just from the NDP, but also from women's organizations across the country and even from the UN.

Without a strategy, services are disjointed and lack coordination and consistency. According to the Canadian Network of Women's Shelters & Transition Houses, without a national plan, responses to violence are often fragmented and inaccessible and can even undermine rather than enhance women's safety.

We need to tackle the underlying problem of inequality, which helps perpetuate this violence. That is why we need a national child care plan, because creating accessible and affordable child care spaces, as Quebec did, would help improve gender equality in Canada.

We need a plan for affordable housing and ongoing commitments to invest in a national housing strategy so that women do not have to choose between staying in an abusive relationship and being homeless.

We need to reduce and eliminate the wage gap and take measures such as making EI more accessible, increasing the minimum wage, creating a national strategy to reduce poverty and dropping the age of eligibility for the GIS back down from 67 to 65. All of these things affect women more directly than men.

Budget cuts made by successive Liberal and Conservative governments have only made matters worse for women in Canada. In 1999, Canada ranked first on the UN gender inequality index, but now we are ranked 23rd.

Meanwhile, every night, 4,600 women and their children are forced to sleep in shelters to escape violence. Many are even turned away because the shelters are already at 100% capacity.

Nearly 2,000 aboriginal women, 1,181 to be precise, disappeared or were murdered between 1980 and 2012.

A national strategy to address violence against women in Canada is absolutely crucial. We need to reduce and eventually eliminate it. This has been an urgent matter for some time now, and we need to deal with it immediately.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member of Parliament for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, I rise to respond to the motion brought forward by the official opposition regarding missing and murdered aboriginal children.

My riding in eastern Ontario includes the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan and I am proud of the working relationship that I developed with Chief Kirby Whiteduck and his band councillors, Jim Meness, Daniel Kohoko, Ronald Benard, Jerry Lavalley, Cliff Meness, and Sherrylyn Sarazin. It is important to develop positive

relations, particularly in areas like economic development, unemployment and the provision of social services.

Rural issues cross all boundaries. Renfrew County residents know how important it is to work together as we share common goals.

Fortunately for our resident aboriginal population, many of the challenges that face urban dwellers, particularly aboriginal women, are not the issues we face in rural Ontario and in rural Renfrew County and the Nipissing District community of South Algonquin in my riding.

The Government of Canada is deeply concerned about the high incidence of violence against aboriginal women and the impact of this violence on families and communities. As a member of the Government of Canada, I share our deep concern about the incidence of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls.

I am sure there is not a person here today who could begin to fathom the tragic losses that far too many aboriginal families have experienced in the aftermath of violent crime. All parliamentarians are in full agreement that violent crimes committed against aboriginal women and girls must be strongly denounced. Not only must they be denounced, but we must take concrete action to prevent such violence in the first place. We must protect women and girls from violence. We need to ensure that strong law enforcement and justice systems are in place to support victims and bring those who commit these acts to justice.

These actions are in keeping with the recommendations from the House of Commons Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women. I am pleased to confirm it was our Conservative government that established the special committee on missing and murdered aboriginal women in 2013. The committee conducted hearings into missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls in Canada. It was mandated to propose solutions to address the root causes of violence against aboriginal women and girls. In March 2014, the special committee released its report, "Invisible Women: A Call to Action".

I am encouraged to report that this is precisely what we are doing with the September 2014 release of our Conservative government's action plan to address family violence and violent crimes against aboriginal women and girls. The action plan includes a range of measures totalling nearly \$200 million over five years to address violence against aboriginal women and girls. It is informed by the many studies and reports on this issue which have increased our knowledge and understanding of the nature and causes of these crimes. This includes the intelligence gathered through the RCMP's recent national operational overview.

Private Members' Business

There have already been over 40 studies related to missing and murdered aboriginal women. Aboriginal organizations and family members have told us what is needed now is action. That is what the action plan to address family violence and violent crimes against aboriginal women and girls is designed to do. It prevents violence by supporting community level solutions, supports aboriginal victims with appropriate services, and protects aboriginal women and girls by investing in shelters and continuing to improve Canada's law enforcement and justice systems. With this action plan, our government uses the best tools at our disposal to prevent violence, support victims, and protect aboriginal women and girls.

• (1900)

Of course, a plan alone will not achieve all of the results that we need. Reducing violence requires a collective effort from everyone with a stake in this issue. It requires more than just the actions of the federal government. It requires collaboration. It requires leadership from police, the justice system, aboriginal communities, and organizations. It also requires constant engagement with those aboriginal families that have been torn apart by this violence.

At the February 2015 National Roundtable on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, families courageously shared their stories, and the experiences that they shared were both tragic and enlightening. They highlighted the need for better coordination and better communication, and the need for measurable and tangible actions that will demonstrate progress and results. The roundtable proved very useful in this regard, and all of the participants agreed on further actions to be taken jointly, with a commitment to a second roundtable to take place in 2016. Partners collectively committed to work toward better prevention, safety, policing, and justice measures to address violence against aboriginal women and girls across Canada.

The Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada plays an important role in addressing, protecting, and preventing family violence in communities. The department funds a variety of programs and services to support better outcomes for aboriginal women, girls, and families, including family violence prevention activities, child and family services, economic security and prosperity through skills and training and economic development, along with housing and education.

The family violence prevention program is one critical component. With an annual budget of \$31.74 million, the program supports the day to day operations of 41 shelters for women and their children, as well as prevention activities, which involve men and boys and women and girls. Approximately 329 communities, or 55% of all first nations, are served by the 41 Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada funded shelters.

• (1905)

In 2013-14, these shelters provided services to over 2,330 children and 2,850 women living on reserve. In areas where there are no shelters on reserve, first nations may access provincial shelters, crisis lines and/or transportation services to nearby shelters. The program also reimburses Alberta and Yukon for shelter services provided to women and children considered ordinary residents on reserve who access provincial shelters.

As of April 1 of this year, an additional \$1.34 million is being made available for family violence prevention activities. The kinds of activities receiving funds include public awareness campaigns, conferences, support groups, and community needs assessments. Over 300 such community-based projects were funded by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada in 2012-13. Since 2006, the department has invested \$242.6 million in family violence prevention. These investments have provided shelter services for almost 22,000 children and over 25,500 women.

This is money well spent. The family violence prevention program increases the safety and security of women, children and families on reserve by providing a refuge for victims of violence.

I want to assure my hon. colleagues that our commitment extends to women and girls living off reserve. The department supports important investments through urban aboriginal strategy programming, and the strategy is delivered in partnership with the National Association of Friendship Centres.

I have appreciated the opportunity to discuss the many ways that we prevent violence against aboriginal women and children.

• (1910)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The time provided for the consideration of this item of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

[*English*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 30(7), the House will now proceed to the consideration of Bill C-642, under private members' business.

* * *

CORRECTIONS AND CONDITIONAL RELEASE ACT

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC) moved that Bill C-642, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (high profile offender), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise in the House tonight to start the debate on second reading of my private member's bill, Bill C-642. Before I begin, I want to thank my colleague the hon. member for Miramichi for seconding my bill. I certainly appreciate her doing that.

Private Members' Business

I feel very confident that my colleagues will see the wisdom of these proposed amendments to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act. This private member's bill would amend the act so as to require the Correctional Service of Canada to disclose certain key information regarding the statutory release of a high-profile offender. This would be accomplished by posting the required information on the service's website, as prescribed by the bill, and by also providing written notice with the disclosure of the information to the victim or victims. The legislation would also provide for community consultation related to the proposed release.

I introduced the bill in order to fulfill a commitment I made to the citizens of my community of Saint John after they were exposed to a situation that many felt was a major injustice, in 2013. The perceived injustice that I am speaking of was the introduction of three serious offenders into our community, without prior notice or without people even understanding who they were dealing with, what they looked like, what restrictions were imposed on them, or what was being done for the protection of the citizens in our area.

As an example of this, I would like to refer to a news article at the time that described one of these individuals, who had been convicted of raping eight women. He was sentenced to 37 years in prison. He qualified for statutory release and was released from prison to the Paratown Community Corrections Centre, after having served two-thirds of his 37-year sentence. However, what got people quite concerned was that the news article stated that a recent assessment had indicated that this individual's risk to reoffend and commit another sexual assault was in the high end of the moderate range. That had community members on edge.

I want to highlight that this could happen in any community throughout Canada that is home to a halfway house that houses high profile offenders prior to their full release.

I want to say at the outset that I believe that we in society have an obligation to do our part to reintegrate individuals back into society once they have paid their dues. However, it cannot be done without looking after the mental and physical well-being of law-abiding citizens.

I stated back at the time that this whole situation unfolded in Saint John that there must be stronger rules to ensure more public disclosure of information surrounding the release of high-risk sex offenders in the application of conditions to the release that protect the public interest. I am no different from anyone else. I certainly consider Saint John to be a wonderful area in which to live, with a lot of support services for the people who need it. I believe we have an obligation to protect those who are vulnerable from potential risks. This is an area of responsibility that we all take very seriously, and we do in Saint John for sure.

Saint John, New Brunswick, is home to the Paratown Community Correctional Centre, which is commonly referred to as a halfway house by most. We also have a strong chapter of the John Howard Society. Together they do great work helping prisoners re-enter life in the community. However, their job is not the protection of the public.

The National Parole Board and the approach we have taken to prisoner releases in Canada give the role of protecting the public to

the police and to us, the lawmakers of Canada. We need to provide the police with the tools they require when doing their job. At the present time, it is left to the local police to decide if they will inform the public about the release of dangerous criminals. They must balance the right of the prisoner with the right of the public to know. This is not fair to the police and it is definitely not fair to the public.

There is another example in another news article from 2013 when this was unfolding in my riding. Another individual, different from the one I referred to earlier, was released from prison after having served a 12-year sentence for forcible confinement and sexual assault.

• (1915)

This was put out by the Saint John Police Force. The Saint John Police Force considered this individual to be a high risk to offend sexually and violently against females and other vulnerable persons. They went on to say that the Saint John Police Force was issuing this information in warning after careful deliberation about all related issues, including privacy concerns, in the belief that it was clearly in the public interest to inform the members of the community. It is quite extraordinary to have an article like that appear in the local newspaper. It certainly caused concern for many citizens in Saint John.

We need to protect the citizens of our communities that play host to these dangerous offenders as they are reintroduced in society.

In 2013, the city of Saint John played host to three individuals, as I mentioned earlier, who were deemed to be dangerous offenders and who it was determined had a high chance of reoffending. Each was in jail for sex-related crimes, and the people of my community were alarmed when they learned of their release into the Saint John area. We had no idea what they looked like, where they were staying for sure, and what restrictions were placed on their movements, if any.

We were not made aware of their release into the community until after it had already occurred. Concerned citizens, as one can probably imagine, held rallies, signed petitions, and raised the issue in the media. They raised the issue with city council, provincial MLAs, and me, their member of Parliament.

At the time, I made a commitment to try to ensure that this situation was not repeated in Saint John or in any other community in Canada. I felt it was important for communities to have the information they needed in advance to allow the police and citizens to be prepared and to make sure that the victims of the people who had violated them were informed as well.

The Saint John city council passed motions about having access to more information about the people being released into the community. Again, I refer to another article at the time about these motions, when city council was debating this. In the motion, one of the councillors, the deputy mayor, actually, stated:

I believe it is important that we understand the process by which these types of offenders are released and how locations are chosen as well as what support is available from the Federal Government for those communities expected to accept such individuals.

She went on to say:

Private Members' Business

People are concerned, and rightly so. The absence of good information just exacerbates the concern. I would like to have accurate data to be able to decide what the issues are.

I have all the faith in the world in our law enforcement officials here, but I want to provide them with all the support I can to ensure that they understand the process and what supports are necessary and what resources might be available elsewhere to help them.

The deputy mayor made it clear that she was not asking for the disclosure of offenders' personal information. She went on to say:

I respect the fact that people who've been convicted of an offence served their time, and they do need to be able to re-establish a life for themselves. But at the same time, we do have a responsibility to our community to ensure that the quality of life is maintained for our citizens.

Obviously, as politicians, we are called upon to respond to many situations, and I did respond at that time to that situation talked about in another article. I went on to say in that article that I think the public needs to be aware of the nature of the release. With each of these individuals, there are conditions applied, and the public should be aware of the conditions that are applied. That was in a news article at the time.

That is the gist of what I am trying to say here today. As lawmakers, I believe we have an obligation to listen to people and to act in the interests of the majority. I undertook in 2013 to address the needs and concerns of the people of my riding. They were concerned and were looking to us to provide them with the protection and information they needed to make themselves feel good about walking the streets of their community.

I want to be very clear. Bill C-642 does not interfere with the rights of the inmate being released. It does not change the fact that they are being released. It does not deny them the protection provided by our Canadian justice and correctional system. What it does do is give the citizens of our country and the victims of crime more information and a sense that they are being treated fairly.

It makes the release of certain dangerous offenders become part of the public record.

● (1920)

It would no longer be the responsibility of the police in local communities to decide if certain information should be made public. This would also give the public and victims the knowledge that those certain individuals would not be able to quietly, under the veil of secrecy, enter their community and quite possibly reoffend before the community even knew they were there.

I must point out one very important point. This change would not apply to all offenders being released into our communities. It would only apply to the most dangerous offenders, as defined by schedule 1 of the act, and if the commissioner were to determine that the offence dynamics had elicited or had the potential to elicit a community reaction in the form of public or media attention.

I look forward to the members, my fellow lawmakers and protectors of the public, supporting this simple change that would give the general public the notice and the information they deserved when a dangerous offender was to be released into a community. We as elected officials must be responsible to our communities. We must take the steps that are needed to protect the people who make up our great country.

Some will no doubt argue that this is more tough-on-crime legislation. Let them. This is not tough on crime. This is simply informing members of the public of what is happening within their communities. It would provide a protection to the people who deserve to be protected. It would inform and involve members of the public in a key aspect of our justice system.

In this age of social media, especially at a time when municipal policing budgets are under strain, we must do whatever we can to keep the public informed with factual information for communities.

I look forward to the support of members for the bill and to their involvement with the protection of their constituents. In our modern world, information is key. People demand to know what is going on and, as elected representatives, it is our obligation to do what is expected of us, which is provide reliable and valuable information in a timely and predictable fashion.

I look forward to the support of my hon. colleagues and I am ready for any questions they might have.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech.

When this bill was introduced, we consulted several groups of experts on this subject, and a number of questions were raised by interest groups. Before stating my position on this bill, which I will do a little later when I have the opportunity to give a speech, I would like to report what Steve Sullivan, the former federal ombudsman for victims of crime, said about Bill C-642.

Without an evaluation of the possible impact of the disclosure of information on rehabilitation and public safety, Mr. Sullivan wondered what would happen if the victim were related to the offender, if the victim did not want the attention being received or if there were a publication ban. He believes that the bill could also encroach on provincial legislation governing the disclosure of information about dangerous offenders. He also said that every province has laws or policies concerning the disclosure of information, which are often enforced by police services, and that this bill could encroach on their jurisdiction.

First of all, what does my colleague think of the position of the former federal ombudsman for victims of crime? Second, did my colleague consult him or any other representative of victims of crime in Canada?

● (1925)

[*English*]

Mr. Rodney Weston: Mr. Speaker, as I highlighted in my speech, I am very sincere about this being in response to a situation that occurred in my riding at a period of time when people felt very vulnerable. People were feeling left out of the system. They were feeling not a part of it, not understanding what was happening within their community, not aware until after it had already taken place. This bill simply would allow for the transfer of more information to communities that house these individuals when they are completing their sentence or when there are conditions applied to their sentence and they are re-entered into society.

Private Members' Business

There is nothing wrong with the public being aware of this. It would change nothing for the individual inmates. What it would do is provide peace of mind to constituents like mine and like the member's when the situation occurs in their communities.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I like to believe there is some commonality among members of Parliament on the issue of public safety. We are all concerned about the constituents we represent and we want them to feel safe in their communities, whether it is a smaller community of a few homes or it is a larger metropolitan-type community. There is no doubt that we can take certain actions that would address some of the issues that they might be bringing to us, whether it is in local restaurants or at their front doors or just having the opportunity to talk to them about issues of this nature.

When we look at making a change of this nature, there is an expectation, and the previous questioner made reference to it, in terms of provincial departments of justice.

Has the member had the opportunity to work with and get some feedback from the departments of justice of any of the provinces, in terms of how they would see the act actually being implemented in their jurisdictions?

Mr. Rodney Weston: Mr. Speaker, when I developed the bill or talked with people about putting forward the bill, as I said earlier, it was in response to an issue that had occurred in my riding. I did talk with many people within my riding, whether it was the chief and the deputy of the local police department, whether it was the municipal council, or regional MLAs at time. Some were ministers, at that time, in the provincial government. All had the same concerns that were related to me by constituents and they have those same concerns related to them in their respective capacities. It is certainly something that we feel is necessary. It will make a difference in how the community views the justice system. It will make a difference in how people feel about being safe within their own communities.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-642, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (high profile offender).

I want to start by saying that I will oppose my Conservative colleague's bill at second reading, and I will explain why in my speech today.

This bill would amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act to require the Correctional Service of Canada, in certain circumstances, to disclose particulars of the statutory release of a high-profile offender by posting those particulars on the service's website and to provide a written notice of the disclosure of the information to the victim. Information including the offender's name and a recent photograph, previous convictions, the date of release, the destination of the offender and any of the conditions attached to the conditional release could be disclosed.

My colleague spoke a lot about the fact that the public has the right to know what is going on, which is connected to what I want to talk about in the second part. I do not know whether the member opposite is aware of these provisions, but I still want to inform people across the country who may be watching right now and following this debate closely.

Right now, the communication of this sort of information is governed by section 25 of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act. Under this section, before the conditional release of an offender, the Correctional Service of Canada notifies all police forces that have jurisdiction at the destination of the offender. Police forces are also given any information that the Correctional Service of Canada has about the offender. If the Correctional Service of Canada has reasonable grounds to believe that an offender poses a threat to any person, police forces can share that information with the general public. That is already in the existing legislation. This decision is left to the discretion of police forces, who are responsible for determining whether such communication is necessary. Right now, it is already possible to do that under the existing legislation. The Correctional Service of Canada transfers the information to the police forces concerned. They are the ones that decide whether or not to disclose the information, for all sorts of reasons that I will talk about later in my speech.

Unfortunately, the bill as it now stands is a way for the Conservatives to play partisan politics rather than establishing a good public safety policy, which Canada really needs. There have been a few examples of this in the area of public safety, whether it be private members' bills or bills that come directly from the government. I am thinking, for example, of Bill C-42, which we are in the process of examining in committee and which deals with the classification of restricted and prohibited weapons. This bill would assign the responsibility for classifying these weapons to cabinet rather than to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, which is who should be responsible for doing that.

As I mentioned, our police forces already have the discretionary power to release information about the offenders referred to in Bill C-642 when they deem it to be necessary. That brings me to the question that I unfortunately did not get an answer to. That question concerns the groups that should have been consulted, groups that have specific questions about Bill C-642.

I think that, in examining this bill, it would have been a good idea to consult victims groups across Canada.

As I mentioned, Steve Sullivan, the former federal ombudsman for victims of crime, had far more questions than answers about this bill and what it involves. I would like to quote him once again for those watching the debate. He said that there was no evaluation of the potential consequences of the disclosure of information on rehabilitation and public safety.

He was concerned about victims of crime and wondered what would happen if the victim were related to the offender and did not want the attention or if there were a publication ban.

He also said that this could be integrated into provincial legislation governing disclosure of information about dangerous offenders. Each province has information disclosure laws and policies often used by police services, and this bill could infringe on their jurisdiction.

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I note that my colleague from the third party asked a question about the provincial laws that would be affected.

● (1930)

Again, my Conservative colleague failed to answer the question.

Studies show that the best results for public safety are obtained through the supervised, gradual reintegration of offenders in society.

Perversely, Bill C-642 might lead some offenders to opt out in order to avoid being covered by the content of the bill, and that is quite serious.

Rehabilitation programs are the cornerstone not only of our Canadian correctional system, but also of our entire political system when it comes to public safety and national security.

The Auditor General's report came out today and raised a relatively serious fact about what goes on at Correctional Service Canada institutions. Last year, 1,500 offenders did not have access to reintegration programs. At the end of their sentence, they left prison directly without having followed this type of program. This is quite serious.

We know, we see it and everyone talks about it, including the police services who happen to be on Parliament Hill today. I commend the Canadian Police Association, which supports all reintegration measures.

Correctional Service Canada works hand in hand with a number of reintegration organizations, including ARCAD, whose \$70,000 annual funding was unfortunately cancelled by the Conservative government. This group performed small miracles in terms of reintegrating different offenders. What is more, this group existed for over 50 years. It therefore had a proven track record.

It is not uncommon to see that the members across the way do not take into consideration all these fine examples and this evidence that everyone wants to work together to ensure that our communities are safer and that, as much as possible, we live in harmony and in a safe system. They do not understand the importance of reintegration. This bill might have some egregious repercussions for safety in general.

We are already going downhill when it comes to reintegration and the false debate surrounding crime. As a society we simply have to make a choice and the choice the Conservatives are making is to play partisan politics with programs as important as those that Correctional Service Canada and their partner organizations are trying to put in place.

Many stakeholders we were able to speak with seemed to share our opinion regarding Bill C-642. I cannot name all of them, but I would like to name a few.

As I mentioned, one such individual is the former federal ombudsman for victims of crime. Another is Howard Sapers, the current Correctional Investigator of Canada. We would have liked him to be able to stay longer, since his reports are always extremely important and interesting.

Howard Sapers said that he finds it unfortunate that offenders are staying in prison longer, much like Marion Vacheret, a professor and criminologist at the Université de Montréal, who said that she does

not understand why the government wants to see offenders kept inside at all costs.

Furthermore, a very interesting article that appeared in *La Presse* in January 2015 had this to say:

...a number of studies have shown that social reintegration has a higher success rate when the offender has spent more time under community supervision before the end of his sentence, in other words, on parole.

I also deplore the lack of consultation by my colleague. I do not know why he did not do more consultation.

When introducing such a bill to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, it is important to consider every possible effect it could have on the Parole Board of Canada.

I think more consultation was needed, and my colleague did not address that very much, especially since this bill aims to replace the objectivity of the Parole Board of Canada with public consultation. That is something that he perhaps should have examined a little more thoroughly.

The Parole Board of Canada always does a remarkable job. The staff there do excellent work and are under a lot of pressure to protect our safety. I think it would have been important for my colleague to do more consultation.

● (1935)

I would like to add that, once again, I will unfortunately have to vote against this bill at second reading. I would like the member to go back to the drawing board and come back to us with something that will encourage social rehabilitation rather than discourage it, as my colleague suggested.

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will begin by saying that I certainly agree with the remarks by the member for Alfred-Pellan.

I will state where we really stand on the bill. We do not support Bill C-642, because one, it is unnecessary, and two, it is excessive in its punitive nature.

If the government should have learned anything today, it should have learned it from the Auditor General. In terms of his comments, the Conservative government's so-called tough on crime bills, but not smart on crime, in the House which the government has enacted over time are in fact leading to our streets in Canada being less safe. That is clearly what the Auditor General indicated in his comments.

We are seeing people being put out on the street without proper rehabilitative measures taken. They are just put out cold turkey on the street, and the chance of their reoffending is much greater than it would have been if they had been treated with the proper parole within the prison system.

The bill before us would amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act to require the Correctional Service of Canada in certain circumstances to disclose particulars of the statutory release of a high-profile offender by posting those particulars on Correctional Service's website and to provide a written notice of the disclosure of information to the victim. The enactment would also provide community consultation relating to the proposed release.

It sounds good on the surface, but when we dig into it in any sense at all, the bill just does not make sense. A responsible government, and the Conservative government is certainly not one, must approach changes to our criminal justice system seriously. Changes must rely on evidence to demonstrate that they are necessary to ensure Canadians' safety.

It is interesting in this place to hear the backbench members get up all the time and talk about "our government". Really, the government is the cabinet. The backbench members are just members of the Conservative Party. They are not the government, but they get up and talk about "our government". However, it is funny that when they bring forward a private member's bill, it is suddenly a private member's bill, when we know it is really a Conservative agenda in which they are picking here and there. The ultimate result is that they are jeopardizing the criminal justice system with these one-off bills which are designed to give backbench members a little credibility in their ridings. I know they do not want to hear it, but those are the facts.

Any legislation, especially from government backbench members, should be done as a comprehensive criminal justice package. What have we seen? I think it is something like 16 private member's bills on criminal justice. In fact, some of them will be challenged at the Supreme Court. Some of them will be rolled back. Actually, at the end of the day, these private member's bills which are coming from the government side will actually jeopardize the criminal justice system and possibly even make our streets less safe.

Bill C-642 is based on the assumption that those responsible for monitoring the releases of high-profile offenders are somehow unprepared for such a release, but evidence indicates that is not the fact at all. In fact, that is simply not true.

● (1940)

Correctional Service Canada already has an effective structure in place, and there is already an obligation to inform the victims about the release of the offender.

Furthermore, there is nothing in this bill that addresses the key issue, which is how to ensure that offenders, high-profile or otherwise, do not reoffend.

The first point is that we must rely on facts and evidence, particularly when changing laws that affect the safety of Canadians. This legislation fails to demonstrate that there is substantial need or that these high-profile offenders pose a direct threat to public safety.

Further, the bill is focused on punishment instead of making Canadians and our communities safer, which clearly comes right to the point the Auditor General made today. If we read the report of the Auditor General, we will see it says that the cumulative effect of the government's bills over the past number of years is making our

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streets in Canada less safe, not more safe, and Canadians will pay a price for that kind of strategy by the current government.

This bill is yet another example of Conservative legislation that aims to further ensure the isolation of offenders who, under the law, must be released. Instead of pursuing this punitive legislation, the government should address some of the real issues affecting our correctional facilities.

The first is rehabilitation, which is shown to decrease reoffending. That was in fact what today's Auditor General's report was all about.

The second is double-bunking inmates, which causes even greater difficulties within the prison system, even greater disillusionment, and even greater risk to those people who work in the correctional system.

The third is the growing number of incarcerated offenders with mental health issues, which is not in any form being addressed by this bill or any others that the Conservative government is putting forward. We know that this is really not a private member's bill but rather a strategy by the government as a whole, and probably comes right out of the Prime Minister's Office.

These are the priorities of any responsible government, and they are not the priorities of the current government, so we know it is not really a responsible government.

Correctional Service Canada, under the Commissioner's directive, "Information Sharing", revised July 24, 2014, currently is required to provide the following information related to those defined as "high profile offenders":

41. The Parole Officer will ensure the high profile offender flag has been entered in the offender's file in OMS.

42. The high profile offender flag will be deactivated only in consultation with the Regional Communications Manager. The only circumstance warranting a removal of the high profile offender flag is when the flag has been activated in error.

43. If it is determined that the proposed decision or event regarding a high profile offender is likely to generate significant public attention and impact public safety or the safe return of the offender to the community, the Institutional Head/District Director will ensure the Parole Officer forwards an e-mail, upon a decision being rendered, to the regional distribution list created for high profile offenders. The e-mail will include, at a minimum, the following:

a. the offender's name and FPS number

b. an indication of the proposed case management decision or event, the geographic location of the event and the anticipated date and length of the event, when known

c. any known public interest or recent community attention that are likely to be significant and may impact public safety or the safe return of the offender to the community.

44. Upon receipt of the notification from the Parole Officer, the Regional Communications Manager will advise if there are any additional media concerns, using the regional distribution list created for high profile offenders.

Simply put, there are already a lot of conditions in place. This bill is unnecessary. It is more of the same, punitive in nature, and does absolutely nothing for the public safety of Canadians.

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● (1945)

Ms. Roxanne James (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am certainly pleased to speak today to private members' Bill C-642, which was introduced by my colleague, the member for Saint John. Contrary to what the Liberal member for Malpeque just said, I would like to thank him for taking an issue that is very personal to his constituency, listening to the concerns of his constituents in his riding and bringing solutions to Ottawa to address those concerns. Members of Parliament should be doing that.

Since being elected in 2006, our government has been very clear. For too long, the rights of criminals have come before the rights of victims and the rights of all law-abiding Canadians. That is why we have passed over 30 measures to crack down on crime. Our government has a strong record on this issue, and we can see the results. Contrary to what the Liberals believe or what they think, crime has actually gone down, and Canadians feel safer in their homes and in their communities.

The legislation before us seeks changes to how victims and the Canadian public are informed about high-profile offenders who are released into communities on statutory release. Our Conservative government is pleased to support the bill.

At the outset, let me provide a brief background on statutory release.

Since the first Penitentiary Act of 1868, various mechanisms have existed to allow for the early release of criminals. The rationale was to provide an incentive for good behaviour and rehabilitation. Until 1992, these mechanisms were based on various combinations of statutory release and earned remission. Statutory release itself was introduced in 1992, when the Corrections and Conditional Release Act was enacted. It allows some low-risk federal offenders to serve the final third of their sentence in the community under strict supervision.

I am pleased to note that this would be changed by the statutory release reform act, which was recently introduced by our government. We would ensure that dangerous, repeat and violent offenders no longer have access to this early release. I look forward to this legislation receiving support from all members of the House. It is unfortunate to note, however, that both the leaders of the NDP and the Liberal Party have indicated that they are opposed to these common sense changes that would protect Canadians.

However, returning back to the legislation before us today, under section 25 of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, Correctional Service of Canada is mandated to share information with the police upon the conditional release of an offender, including statutory release. It also provides the police with an information package about high-risk offenders released into the community at the end of the sentence. If warranted, the police may issue a public notification about a high-risk offender, which generally occurs when the offender is released at the end of their sentence.

As we know, the release of violent or sexual offenders can cause a great deal of anxiety in communities. We heard that today from the member who brought forward this bill. I imagine that most of my colleagues in the House share the same concerns as the member for

Saint John, who was compelled to introduce this bill after three high-profile offenders were released to a halfway house in his riding last year.

The legislation before us would help to provide communities with important information about a high-profile offender before he or she would begin statutory release. It would also offer an avenue for community officials to provide feedback to Correctional Service of Canada before the offender would be released, feedback that would be considered in the development of the community release strategy for the offender.

Allow me now to go into more detail about the four provisions of the proposed legislation.

It begins by proposing a definition for a high-profile offender in the CCRA. A high-profile offender is defined as one who has committed an offence under schedule 1 of the CCRA and who, as a result, has been or has the potential to be the subject of a significant public or media interest. The first part of this definition is clear. Schedule 1 includes a broad range of violent and sexual offences, including more serious offences such as aggravated assault, hostage taking and robbery.

As for the second part of the definition, the Commissioner of the Correctional Service of Canada would determine whether the dynamics of the offence caused or had the potential to cause significant public interest.

To give members an idea of the numbers that we are talking about, over the last 10 years, an average of 324 offenders who had made the definition of high-profile were released on statutory release each year.

● (1950)

Next, the bill proposes that Correctional Service of Canada be required to post a range of information about a high-profile offender on its website before the offender is released on statutory release. This will consist of the high-profile offender's name, photo, previous convictions, date of release, and the destination and any conditions attached to the statutory release itself.

As is often the case when dealing with the criminal justice system, there would be exceptions to the release of this information when its disclosure would have a negative impact on the safety of the public.

The third provision of the bill would require CSC to provide written notice of a high-profile offender's pending release and the release information to the victim.

Our government has long advocated for a shift in the focus of our criminal justice system. We have worked toward giving victims a clear, strong voice for the entire judicial process, as well as putting in place measures that give victims more access to information.

Indeed, we have recently introduced legislation to create a Canadian victims bill of rights. One of those rights is for the right to information, which would enshrine a victim's right to receive information about the progress and investigation of the offence, the timing and location of proceedings, their outcome and information about reviews and timing of the offender's conditional release.

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To ensure that Bill C-642 does not duplicate provisions found in the victims bill of rights act, we will examine amendments at the committee stage to ensure the bill is as effective as possible.

The fourth provision of this legislation would require CSC to provide notice of the release of the offender into the community and to hold public consultations with representatives of that community, including the local police. CSC would then take those views into account when preparing to release the offender.

This is yet another important step in our efforts to keep victims and all Canadians informed about the whereabouts of high-profile offenders.

I would like to thank the member for Saint John for bringing forward this important legislation, for bringing a forward a bill to the House that represents the concerns of his constituency. On this side of the House, we actually support these types of measures. Although the New Democrats and the Liberals have said they will not support it, I certainly hope they do come to their senses and join me in supporting the bill.

• (1955)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, upon listening to my speech, members will quickly understand not only my interest in but also my uneasiness—and even my ambiguity—in speaking clearly to the matter before legislators, namely Bill C-642, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (high profile offender).

In October 2009, my cousin Natasha was savagely kidnapped by a repeat offender, a sexual predator. He murdered her shortly after assaulting her. The authorities found her body a few days later. My life, the lives of her close relatives and especially her mother's life were turned upside down forever. When the police caught this high-profile offender, his long list of misdeeds gave pause to our society: hostage-taking, repeated sexual assault, repeated domestic violence—which are all found in Schedule I of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act—and also drunk driving, road rage, drug possession and other offences.

It makes you wonder why he was out on parole. In reality, the real questions this evening are as follows: Would this bill have affected his release? How could the people involved have influenced this decision? I am not really convinced that it would have made a difference.

First, this amendment to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act concerning high-profile offenders is grossly inadequate, meaningless and unfortunate when we examine the scope of its provisions. There is absolutely nothing about their reintegration into society and, more particularly, there is nothing about providing resources to victims. Tracking the comings and goings of an offender in a neighbourhood or community is not going to alleviate the stress of victims of crime, let alone prevent offenders from committing other crimes in a community, regardless of how close by or how far the offender is living.

I will not even comment on the availability of drug treatment programs, mental illness treatment programs, and anger or violence management programs, let alone their effectiveness.

The objective of the bill is to require the Correctional Service of Canada, in certain circumstances, to disclose particulars of the statutory release of a high-profile offender by posting those particulars on the service's website and to provide a written notice to the victim, but the bill definitely misses the mark. Our police forces already have the discretionary power to disclose all of the relevant information regarding offenders covered in Bill C-642 when they deem it necessary. In the specific case I mentioned, it would have been extremely necessary.

As a result, this objective, while laudable, calls into question the credibility of this bill, especially if we look at the results of the consultations this government has held on these types of issues since 2006. Not once have the Conservatives considered anything important coming from citizens' groups or stakeholders. The minister and his government simply hold phony consultations, which have become old hat now, in order to satisfy their need for control and partisan politics, at the expense of good public policy and good faith that could make our streets and neighbourhoods safer.

In this case, even though all kinds of people testified in committee that it was important to provide prevention programs or other types of programs to someone who is being reintegrated or released, nothing to that effect was included in this bill.

• (2000)

I would remind the House that according to the Correctional Service of Canada's definition, a high-profile offender is an offender whose offence dynamics have elicited or have the potential to elicit a community reaction in the form of significant public or media interest.

When the NDP voted in favour of Bill C-32, the Victims Bill of Rights Act, which provides for a mechanism for communicating information to victims regarding an offender's conditional release, we thought the issue was resolved. Alas, no, this is just more partisanship. The practical political interests of an upcoming propaganda campaign are the impetus for this bill, which serves no legal purpose and does nothing to improve public safety.

Specifically, this bill has to do with high-profile offenders who have committed a schedule 1 offence, as my colleagues have already mentioned. Such offences include causing injury with intent, using a firearm, invitation to sexual touching, child pornography, corruption, criminal negligence causing death, criminal negligence causing bodily harm, as well as dangerous driving, harassment, assault, rape and aggravated assault. Many of those offences were among the ones committed by the criminal I was talking about earlier.

These offences are enough to make Canadians shudder. Nobody wants the people who have committed these crimes anywhere near them. Everyone agrees on that. However, the victims' bill of rights already includes provisions on the disclosure of the comings and goings and all of the information the victims want.

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However, victims do not always want that information. They just want to know that these predators are far away from them. Regardless of formal demands, criminals always come back. That is stressful for victims and can cause burnout.

We live in a changing world. People want to live freely, to enjoy health and safety. That is one of the principles that all bills should be based on to ensure they are useful and pragmatic.

It is clear to me that weakening the social fabric by cutting front-line services, such as food banks, education and mental health services, does not help people who are vulnerable and marginalized, nor does it help struggling or single-parent families.

It is our duty to put those who can be redeemed back on the right track. Some can be redeemed, but they need reintegration programs and help. The resources have to be available. This government puts various provisions in place through its bills, but it constantly forgets about resources, both human and financial.

In conclusion, I believe that this bill is futile and useless. It does not achieve the objective of making our society safer, even though that is what Canadians expect. The NDP believes that we must help victims of crime get their lives back by ensuring that they can benefit from all of the services they need, including the full range of legal and health services. We want to work with victims' groups to find real, pragmatic solutions.

• (2005)

[English]

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know that I have very limited time tonight, but I do want to chime in on this debate because I think, with all due respect to the very honourable intentions of the member for Saint John, it is never really a good idea to craft legislation around a single incident. As the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness referred to, this is another case of common sense. As we all know, common sense is not all that common and quite often, it is quite wrong about what works in the criminal justice field.

Unfortunately, what we have here is a government that often prefers to prey on fear rather than do what is most effective. We know what works with offenders, and that is a gradual supervised reintegration into the community. What the bill would do, despite its good intentions, is interfere with that process for far too many offenders and ultimately, inadvertently would result in more victims.

The police already have the power to release information on those offenders who present a threat to the public. That standard is quite an important one, and that is the one the bill would change. It says that the standard would now be that if there is public fear or public interest, the information should be released. However, what we have to accept is that the police already have the power to do this when it is a question of public safety, and they already do this when public safety is at risk.

I would argue the bill is both dangerous and unnecessary.

We know what kinds of things work, and I just want to give a short example as I am very quickly running out of time.

We know when sexual offenders are released back into the community that a program called CoSA, Circles of Support and Accountability, really works. What the Conservative government has done as of March 31 is it has cut all the funding to the CoSA programs around the country. This means that they are beginning to close down slowly. These are programs that surrounded the offenders with support and people, largely volunteers from the faith community, who monitored what they did in the community. They have very high success rates, between 80% and 100% success.

This program, which was something that was actually very effective in preventing more victims in the community, was eliminated. Instead, we have the proposal coming forward in the form of a government bill, Bill C-56, and we have this private member's bill which, as I said, unfortunately, is unnecessary and would be dangerous to the successful reintegration of offenders into their communities.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): 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 ANTHEM

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the first thing I want to do is offer an apology to a colleague. In early April, I commissioned a poll about the proposed modification of the English version of O Canada, and in a press release about the poll results and the first hour of debate, we correctly identified the role of the MP for Richmond Hill as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. However, when we sent an op-ed last Friday to National Newswatch, we erred in identifying him as the PS to the heritage minister. For that I apologize to my colleague, and I assure him that the error will not be repeated.

Now I move on to the response to my question of last week about the government's basing its position on the results of a poll that misrepresented the current lyrics of O Canada. The MP for St. Catharines, sadly, did not address the question in his answer. Yesterday, during the second hour of debate on Bill C-624, the member said that the anthem had not been changed in 100 years. He was wrong.

The original English version was written in 1908, and it included "us" in the second verse. It was changed to "thy sons" in 1914. It was modified again in 1916, in 1927, and in 1980, when both versions were enacted by Parliament in the House and the Senate in one day. The reason for that expedient enactment was a desire to officialize in law the lyrics to celebrate the centennial of the French version, first sung in 1880. Incidentally, the French lyrics have never been changed, because they have always been inclusive of all of us.

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During that day of June 27, 1980, the official opposition House leader, the late Hon. Walter Baker, a Progressive Conservative, and the Hon. Ed Broadbent, then leader of the NDP, both confirmed their desire to review the lyrics of the English version, and the government gave its commitment to do that in the following session. The same commitment was repeated later that same day in the Senate at the urging of many senators, including the late Hon. Florence Bird, who specifically wanted “women” to be included in our anthem. Unfortunately, it never happened, and tomorrow will be the first time since 1980 that parliamentarians will be asked to vote on this matter.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage also suggested that traditions demand that we not modify our symbols. I have to disagree, and in fact, the changing of symbols is something that regularly happens to reflect societal evolution. I gave, and will repeat, two examples.

First is our coat of arms. In 1921, King George V added the maple leaf to it, because in the preceding decades, the maple leaf had become a symbol that most Canadians associated with.

The second example was the adoption by this chamber, in 1965, after a long and sometimes acrimonious debate, of a new flag, which rapidly became a symbol that most Canadians embrace.

In the past century, our society has evolved. In 1914, there were no women soldiers. Now there are, and the first one died in Afghanistan: Nichola Goddard. Her mother supports this bill.

Women also got the right to vote in 1921 and were declared persons in 1929, which led to the first female senator, Cairine Wilson. Then in 1982, our Charter of Rights and Freedoms guaranteed the equality of men and women before the law.

Finally, the parliamentary secretary also said that few countries dared change their anthems. Does he not know that Australia's parliamentarians did so in 2011 and added the word “daughters” to make it more inclusive, which is exactly what we should do?

I hope that tomorrow Canada's MPs will decide to include 52% of our population now excluded from our anthem because we sing “our sons”. Let us start singing “all of us” instead. That is the right thing to do, and I hope we will do so and represent the evolution of our society over the last century.

● (2010)

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the member obviously has done some more writing on his private member's bill. If he had actually checked my speech or listened a little more closely, he would have heard that I referred to the line in the national anthem that has not changed in 100 years, not what he was referring to.

I want to correct him, for the record; he is wrong. Not only is he wrong on the statement and speech I gave yesterday, but he is actually incorrect in terms of his approach on this issue.

In 2010, the government made its position very clear. Canadians love our national anthem. They do not want to see it changed. Our government will honour the wishes of Canadians. Our government will preserve our national anthem.

Again, this is the position the government has held since 2010, when a similar idea was mentioned in the Speech from the Throne, and Canadians made it very clear to us that they want to keep *O Canada* as it is.

Mr. Speaker, you were part of the government, part of the House in 2010, and I think you could reflect back on the number of phone calls and discussions you had back in your riding regarding a consideration that we were going to make a change to the anthem.

The member for Ottawa—Vanier is asserting in his question that the government based its position, taken in 2010, on a poll completed in 2013. I am not sure if he can travel back and forth in time, but I know that the government cannot and certainly I cannot. We made the decision, based in our throne speech in 2010, to not change the country's national anthem. It was not based on a decision of a poll in 2013. That is obviously false, and the member should know better.

As for the poll he is fond of citing, the questions appear to have been designed to encourage people to say yes. A question from that poll reads:

The original English Anthem uses the word US, the current version uses THY SONS. Which version do you believe is most appropriate?

It is a clear attempt to make people associate the member for Ottawa—Vanier's version with that of Robert Stanley Weir, the original author who wrote the line, “in all thy sons command”.

The poll used leading questions to associate his bill's new version of the anthem with the original meaning of Robert Stanley Weir's version. I understand why, because tradition is important to Canadians

If we wanted to produce a yes, that is exactly how we would ask the question. We might get a different result if we asked Canadians to choose between the 100-year-old words of *O Canada* author Robert Stanley Weir and the words of the member for Ottawa—Vanier.

All parties in this House believe in gender equality, and our government recognizes the many contributions of Canadian women in many ways, which I mentioned in the debate yesterday. However, as a Parliament we should not alter Canada's national symbols without having substantial support from Canadians. In this case, it does not exist.

● (2015)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, that is such nonsense.

The support does exist. The poll I commissioned actually uses the correct lyrics of our anthem. It is quite clear: 58% of Canadians support it and just 19% oppose it.

What the member forgets is that, in the first hour of debate, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, who was speaking on behalf of the government, was referring to the 2013 poll as the reason for the government's opposition to this. I recognize that in 2010 the Conservatives did say in the Speech from the Throne that they would do this, and they got a lot of calls from their supporters.

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If we do a poll and misrepresent the words of our anthem in soliciting the response of Canadians, we can expect that to be in error. However, if we do it and quote the anthem accurately and ask them questions, we would then get the true feelings of Canadians.

I would hope that parliamentarians would acknowledge that and do the right thing tomorrow.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Mr. Speaker, I think the member knows how the vote is going to go tomorrow. This is his last attempt to get a little ink for himself, a little press or whatever he deems necessary.

There are a lot of other things in this House that we need to focus on. Canadians are not asking us to change our national anthem. Canadians are singing our national anthem right the way it is. They do not want to see a change. They want to see this government, this House, and the opposition deal with the issues that matter to Canadians.

Canadians love their national anthem the way it is. They love the way they can stand up and sing it in French and English, and they want it to remain the way it is. Canadians believe in tradition, believe in history, and believe in our country.

[*Translation*]

LA FRANCOPHONIE

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last month, following the celebration of the International Day of La Francophonie, I informed this government of several of my concerns about setbacks for the French language in this country.

However, instead of listening to me and answering my questions as a responsible government should do, the Minister of International Development and Minister for La Francophonie gave an answer that had nothing to do with my question.

Do not get me wrong. I am satisfied with the appointment of Michaëlle Jean to the position of Secretary General of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie. I personally wrote to Ms. Jean to wish her every success in her new position, and I also received a reply. I am delighted that some women can reach senior positions where they have the power to make decisions. There are far too few of them.

However, I have a great deal of difficulty seeing the connection between my question and this appointment. Am I to understand that I should turn to Ms. Jean to talk about the alarming situation of minority francophone communities in Canada or the job cuts in the CBC's French service? That includes 10 positions lost in Acadia, 15 in Ontario, 16 in the western provinces, 10 positions at ICI Musique and a 30-minute reduction in the news in Rimouski, Rouyn-Noranda, Saguenay and Trois-Rivières. Should I also ask Ms. Jean about francophone immigration programs in Canada? I know that this government is giving up responsibility for many files by offloading them onto the provinces and territories. However, I did not think that Ms. Jean was also a scapegoat.

My constituents in Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles and I see the Canadian francophonie as something that is very big, powerful and important. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister of Labour told

me that “our government has maintained unprecedented and indisputable support for official languages in Canada”. I doubt it.

As a member of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, I have heard many witnesses say that French has taken a back seat in Canada. A number of minority communities are very concerned because they are at risk of losing more and more of the services provided in French by federal institutions.

The government also withdrew important funding from francophone communities that sent representatives outside Canada to Paris, Brussels or Tunis, for example, as part of the Destination Canada job fairs. They are no longer capable of directly recruiting immigrants who are prepared to settle in francophone communities. Witnesses told us that these representations in francophone countries were an excellent source of recruitment. A number of these witnesses also told us about the lack of coordination between the different levels of government, the lack of a government-wide strategic plan, and the lack of political will to reverse this trend.

The government is not meeting its obligations. It is not taking positive measures to encourage the francophonie under section 41 of the Official Languages Act. It is doing the opposite by using measures that negatively affect the vitality of French in Canada.

Need I remind hon. members that it is incumbent on federal institutions to ensure that positive measures are taken to carry out the commitment to enhance the vitality of the French linguistic minority communities in Canada, support their development, and foster the full recognition and use of French in Canadian society?

I invite the Minister for La Francophonie to review the various motions moved by the NDP at the Standing Committee on Official Languages and encourage his colleagues to support our proposed studies, including the one on the ability of Radio-Canada to fulfill its mandate.

● (2020)

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

Our government helps the francophonie in Canada to thrive in many ways. Our vision and priorities when it comes to supporting our official languages are set out in the Roadmap for Canada's Official Languages 2013-2018: Education, Immigration, Communities.

With regard to education, we have reached agreements with all of the provinces and territories to support French-language education in official language minority communities and the learning of French as a second language. As a result, 150,000 students go to school in French outside Quebec and 1.7 million anglophones are learning French as a second language outside Quebec.

Immigration, the second pillar of our roadmap, is also vital to our communities. Under this pillar, we have increased our efforts to recruit French-speaking immigrants to francophone minority communities.

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Finally, the third pillar of the roadmap is support for communities. We have a series of agreements with the provinces and territories regarding the services offered to Canadians in French. Every year, as part of the Ministerial Conference on the Canadian Francophonie, all levels of government work together to support the delivery of direct provincial and territorial government services in French.

Our support goes beyond the roadmap. Across Canada, nearly 4,000 federal offices provide direct services to Canadians in both French and English.

We also rely on technology to serve all Canadians across the country at any time of day or night in the official language of their choice.

All of our foreign missions are carried out in both official languages. The Prime Minister speaks in both French and English on the world stage. Our government supports the production of French plays, books, magazines, films, and television shows by creators in Quebec and other parts of the country.

In 2017, we will celebrate the 150th anniversary of Confederation, the beginnings of today's Canada, a bilingual, free and democratic country.

Our government held consultations across the country to find out how Canadians want to celebrate this anniversary. We want the celebrations to reflect Canada's bilingual nature.

● (2025)

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his answer.

Indeed, we have a roadmap, but the budgets have not been fully spent and francophone minority communities are sounding the alarm. We must listen to them.

This time I would like direct answers to the following questions. When will the minister finally realize that there are Francophonie issues playing out here in Canada right now? When will this government realize that the recent investments were not enough to compensate for the demographic imbalance of francophones in Canada? When will the government have enough political will to develop a national strategy that includes the federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments as well as francophone minority communities, as required by law?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, the new roadmap for official languages is the most comprehensive investment in Canada's history. With \$1.1 billion in funding, that is indisputable.

The new roadmap has three pillars: education, immigration and communities.

Unlike the NDP, which sadly did not support our \$1.1 billion investment in our two official languages, our government will continue to foster the vitality of official language minority communities through ongoing support for both of Canada's official languages.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 8:27 p.m.)

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