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Monday, April 24, 2006

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, April 24, 2006

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

• (1100)

[*English*]

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed from April 11 consideration of the motion, as amended, for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session.

The Speaker: When the matter was last before the House, the hon. member for Northumberland—Quinte West had five minutes remaining in the time allotted for questions and comments. Are there questions and comments? If not, we will resume debate with the hon. member for Etobicoke Centre.

• (1105)

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Etobicoke North.

I would like to congratulate you on your re-election, Mr. Speaker, and also take this opportunity to thank the people of Etobicoke Centre for the honour of being elected twice in the last year and a half to represent them in the House of Commons. Both times I have been elected by overwhelming electoral margins, which means that my obligations to the people of Etobicoke Centre are that much greater and that I will work on their behalf that much harder. What I bring to the House of Commons from Etobicoke Centre are my constituents' values of hard work, integrity and generosity of spirit.

This past weekend was Easter weekend for my family, as it was for most Ukrainian Canadians as well as those of the Orthodox faith. For this reason, I would like to begin my response to the Speech from the Throne with a quotation from the Bible and one of topics of discussion during this past Easter weekend: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God".

This past weekend, four Canadian lives were extinguished half a world away. These Canadians volunteered and left the safety and warmth of their families' hearths to travel to the dangerous and desolate mountains of Afghanistan. They went there to bring peace to a part of the world where evil continues to breed in caves, where

the men of hate, the Taliban, gather in order to sow the seeds of death, and where, in vast cultivated fields of poppies, the destruction of millions of lives grows.

There is no doubt that these four Canadian soldiers whose lives were extinguished believed that they were fighting a just war, that they were in fact peacemakers. For this ultimate of sacrifices, Corporals Matthew Dinning and Randy Payne, Lieutenant William Turner, and Bombardier Myles Mansell will be remembered as "the sons of God".

The throne speech touched only briefly on Canada's international role, stating that "Canada's voice in the world must be supported by action", that we will support our "core values of freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights", and finally, that our policies will be "infused with growing confidence that...[we] can make a difference".

Unfortunately, the throne speech did not address either a vision or the "how" of our engagement with the world when it comes to supporting these, our core values. True leadership entails a vision and action within the framework of this vision. I will take this opportunity to speak to a vision and a framework on how we as a country can and should engage the world outside of our trade relationships.

Canada's international role has evolved over the last 139 years. For a good portion of our history, we were viewed as a junior partner in the international interventions of imperial powers with which we have been allied. Whether it was the United Kingdom or the United States, or the Boer or Korean wars, Canada could be counted on to send its men and women to wage war alongside our allies. We were also members of grand coalitions during the two world wars.

Finally, half a century ago, a Canadian diplomat, Lester B. Pearson, envisioned a new and groundbreaking role for Canada's soldiers. He envisioned that young Canadian men and women would travel to conflict zones throughout the world not to wage war, but to serve as peacekeepers. This novel approach was a major paradigm shift in how Canada saw itself engaging the world. It earned Lester B. Pearson the Nobel peace prize and established for Canada a tradition of peacekeeping.

Today, using soldiers for peace has evolved and expanded to include peacemaking, as we call our Afghani mission, peacekeeping, as we have done for decades in places such as Cyprus, and peacebuilding, as we are doing in Haiti.

The Address

However, today it is not just Canadian soldiers who are emissaries of peace. Today there are more Canadian civilians volunteering abroad, as humanitarians and civil society builders with non-governmental organizations, than there are Canadian soldiers.

Peacemaking, peacekeeping, peace-building, civil society architects and good governance: it is difficult to understand exactly what these terms entail. When does a soldier become a peacemaker? Does he or she take on a constabulary role in Haiti or civil society building in Afghanistan? How do we guarantee that we do not again make the mistake of using as peacekeepers soldiers trained in the specialties of war, such as the airborne regiment in Somalia?

• (1110)

For Canadians to build on our half-century tradition of peacekeeping and to once again show international leadership, let us establish a clear framework for how we engage in countries where major conflicts or fundamental transitions are taking place.

Let us imagine our Ministry of Defence becoming a ministry of just wars with unambiguous obligations and regulations outlining under which circumstances we would engage in war. In the situation of territorial defence, the case is clear. In the case of war to counter threats to our peace, the threats must be clearly verified and acknowledged by international agencies. In the case of R2P, the responsibility to protect outside of situations of genocide, which require immediate action, it should also include a clear responsibility to rebuild.

Finally, let Canada become the first country in the world to establish a ministry of peace, a ministry which would include peacekeepers, humanitarians, democratic and civil society builders, a ministry with an organizational structure similar to our armed forces that would sign up volunteers for multi-year contracts with a choice of fields of specialization: peacekeeping, humanitarian aid and democratic civil society building.

In any given year there are at least a dozen countries in the world where major conflicts or fundamental transitions take place. Quite often in Canada we have large diaspora communities from several of these countries. Not only do our multicultural communities have linguistic and intimate cultural knowledge but they also have emotional ties to their ancestral homelands. This uniquely Canadian reservoir of human potential can be tapped into to help in the processes of conflict resolution and civil society building.

If properly executed, Canada can establish for itself, through our ministry of peace, an international role as an honest broker which will resolve conflicts and rebuild society without the countries affected fearing a loss of sovereignty or control of national resources.

Having played a positive role during historic transitions, Canada will have established goodwill and trust among the peoples of these countries and their political leadership. Let us give peace a chance.

Today, unfortunately, is an unofficial day of mourning. It comes just days after Easter when we meditated on the selfless sacrifice of oneself in the battle against evil; the concept that through death comes rebirth. Four young Canadians have offered up the ultimate sacrifice, their very lives, to bring hope into the lives of strangers and those not yet born in a country far from home.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God”. Let us envision and build a Canada that will be blessed, for it will be known as a nation of peacemakers, a nation of God.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member talked about peace, Canada's role in peace and the role that former Prime Minister Pearson had in establishing that peacekeeping role for Canada. I, however, remain concerned about Canada's commitment to peacekeeping. Certainly the situation in Afghanistan is of great concern to me and to many people in my constituency. We are concerned when we see that Canada's role in peacekeeping with the United Nations has dropped to 50 among the world's nations with the end of the mission on the Golan Heights. Before that we were 33, which really is not all that impressive a number either when it comes down to it.

I am also concerned about the militarization of our aid, especially when I hear from a Canadian soldier from my riding serving in Afghanistan who says that often the aid projects that the Canadian Forces build in Afghanistan are quickly destroyed once the forces leave the area where the project was built. When insurgents or the Taliban come back into that community they immediately target the aid that was delivered by military people.

Does the member think that our mission in Afghanistan lives up to those Pearsonian standards that he so eloquently described? Does he share my concern about the militarization of our aid in Afghanistan?

• (1115)

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij: Mr. Speaker, I will answer the member's question in two parts.

First, on the issue of commitment, unfortunately our commitment has slid. At the same time, there is a great deal of confusion. Some people talk about our Afghani mission as being a peacekeeping mission but quite clearly it is not.

Can it be justified? Is it a military mission, a just war? I believe that argument can be made but we need to establish clear parameters. What is peace-building? What is peacekeeping? In regard to peacekeeping, the rules were quite clear. Peace negotiations are taking place between the warring sides. A truce has been established. There is a physical buffer between the two warring sides and that buffer is filled by peacekeepers.

Regarding peace-building in Haiti, it seems that our soldiers have taken on the role of a constabulary. Then there is the danger of using soldiers, who were trained as warriors, as peacekeepers. We saw what happened in Somalia.

As the concept evolves and expands into different areas, peace-building and peacemaking, the peacekeeping role should be split off into a separate ministry, a ministry of peace. People trained as peacekeepers use very different equipment than soldiers use in war. I believe that by establishing this sort of ministry we will once again establish a leading role of being a vehicle for peace internationally.

The Address

The second question was regarding militarization of aid. We often find a lack of coordination between NGOs, and the tremendous work that they do, with peacekeepers, peacemakers or peace-builders, and not just in Afghanistan. Having had the opportunity to visit Darfur I believe it is incredibly important to have this ministry of peace that would coordinate with our ministry of defence. However we should establish what that ministry would do. Would it be a ministry of defence or just a war ministry? We need to have coordination between that particular role and the role of rebuilding and building democratic civil societies.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking the wonderful people of my constituency of Langley, British Columbia. It is an honour to be re-elected and to be given this opportunity to represent them once again in Parliament. Langley is one of the most beautiful communities in Canada. It is the birthplace of British Columbia. The Hudson's Bay fort is still there. It is a great place to visit and even a better place to live.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to congratulate you on your responsibilities and appointment.

The Conservative government is already proving itself. Canadians believe that we can and we will introduce positive changes for the betterment of Canada. Canadians also want a government of action. They are tired of stalemates and they are tired of an old government just talking and doing nothing.

The government has five priorities which are based on the values of integrity, family, respect for hard work, achievement and commitment to a strong and free Canada. It is based on values that all Canadians share.

The first priority is to clean up government by passing the federal accountability act. The federal accountability act would toughen the Lobbyists Registration Act. It would ban secret donations to political candidates. It would make qualified government appointments. It would clean up government polling and advertising. It would clean up the procurement of government contracts. It would provide real protection for whistleblowers. It would ensure truth in budgeting with a parliamentary budget office. It would strengthen the power of the Auditor General. It would strengthen the role of the Ethics Commissioner. It would strengthen access to information legislation. It would strengthen auditing and accountability within departments. That is legislation that Canada needs.

It is a priority to provide real tax relief to all Canadians by cutting the GST. We will cut the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%. The GST is the only tax that all Canadians pay. Our plan delivers a tax cut to everyone, including the 32% of Canadians who do not pay any federal income tax.

It is a priority to help parents with the cost of raising their children. Our government will introduce a new \$1,200 per year choice in child care allowance for children under six and a \$250 million community child care investment program for capital assistance for the creation of 125,000 new child care spaces. The choice in child care allowance will apply to an estimated 2 million children of preschool age. Our plan provides money directly to parents. They can choose the child care option that best suits their family needs. That is a good plan.

It is a priority to work with the provinces to establish patient wait time guarantees. Canadians should receive essential medical treatment within clinically accepted wait times. We will work to ensure that Canadians can get urgent medical care when they need it. That is what they paid their taxes for and that is what they will receive. The guarantee will ensure that if people cannot get the medical care that they need where they live in the public system within the established benchmark times, they will be able to get that care either outside of the province or in a private clinic with the cost being covered by public insurance. That is what Canadians want.

Finally, it is a priority of the Conservative government to crack down on crime. As a former member of the House of Commons justice committee, I spent the last two years exploring at length various justice reforms that are desperately needed in Canada. Our Conservative government will make our streets and communities safer by cracking down on crime. Canadians have the right to feel safe in their communities. Our government will stand up for safe streets by tackling gun, gang and drug violence and by keeping criminals off the streets. The government believes that serious crime should have serious time.

We will provide more front line police officers. We will invest in effective gun control, not phony measures. We will get tough with sex offenders. We will strengthen the Youth Criminal Justice Act. We will establish a national victims' ombudsman office. We will enact a national drug strategy. We will secure our borders and we will ensure effective deportation laws.

• (1120)

My riding of Langley has the dubious distinction of having the highest rate of mail theft in Canada. Mail fraud and identity theft are huge problems in Canada and in my riding. It is one of the many issues that have inundated police forces that simply do not have the numbers to follow up on all the reported cases.

A Conservative government will reinvest savings from the cancellation of the ineffective long gun registry into hiring more front line enforcement personnel, including filling 1,000 RCMP positions. We will negotiate with the provinces to create a new cost shared program jointly with provincial and municipal governments to put at least 2,500 more police on the beat in our cities and communities.

Interstate 5 in Washington state is the west coast pipeline not only for trade, but also for illegal drugs. A huge flow of B.C. bud goes down and cocaine comes back up to B.C., along with laundered money, other drugs and guns.

The Address

People smuggling is not just an overseas problem. In my riding people smuggling is second only to drug smuggling. We all remember the Langley drug tunnel from last summer. Illegal immigrants are paying smugglers to bring them across the border. The bushes at the border are riddled with well-worn paths used by smugglers. Security cameras in place on the border are not solving the problem because there is still insufficient manpower in place to actually apprehend the illegal immigrants.

Our Conservative government will create a national security review committee to ensure effective oversight and a greater degree of accountability and transparency regarding Canada's national security efforts. We will ensure that agencies like CSIS, the RCMP and the Canada Border Services Agency have adequate resources and equipment. We will deploy face recognition and other biometric technology at border crossings and ports of entry. We will ensure that the men and women who keep our borders secure are also secure themselves.

Last spring explosive testimony came to the justice committee when it was studying Bill C-2 on child pornography. University of Toronto psychiatrist Dr. Ron Langevin provided shocking results from an intensive study on deviant sex offenders and recidivism rates in Canada.

According to the study, 88% of deviant sex offenders in a 25 year follow-up have reoffended. Dr. Langevin also revealed that 44% of deviant sex offenders who were caught, charged and convicted of crimes were never incarcerated. He told us that sex offenders who serve their sentence at home present a high risk to reoffend. A Conservative government will eliminate conditional sentences for violent and sex offenders. That is good.

In Langley a convicted sex offender, a pedophile who assaulted two young girls who were his neighbours, was given a conditional sentence of house arrest. His sentence included the opportunity to continue watching his victims from his home.

I am proud that this Conservative government will prohibit conditional sentences for sex offences committed against children. We will require the registration of all convicted sex offenders and dangerous offenders. The registry will include mandatory DNA sampling of all those convicted of, or currently in custody for, such offences. We will adopt a zero tolerance policy for child pornography, including raising the age of sexual consent from 14 to 16 years of age. This government is on the right track. We are listening to Canadians.

The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development recently announced funding of \$2.5 million to address an environmental issue in my constituency.

This government listens. It is a government that wants to make Canada safer, better, productive and cleaner.

• (1125)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the election campaign, taxation was an important issue and it is also in the throne speech. There is a discussion now about a reduction in the GST at the expense of rolling back a tax cut that was delivered in the last Parliament. Both have about a \$5 billion price tag. What if the GST cut is not passed on by the providers of goods and services? For

instance, a \$20 theatre ticket will probably still cost \$20 and the gas tax will probably still be kept by the producers. Since there is not a guaranteed flowthrough from the providers of the goods and services to Canadians, it would appear to be an increase in the tax burden of Canadians if the Conservative Party proceeds in the way it promised during the election campaign.

Why did the member's party mislead the Canadian public by saying that there was going to be a tax decrease when in fact the tax burden on Canadians will actually go up?

• (1130)

Mr. Mark Warawa: Mr. Speaker, the member has been consistent regarding taxation. For 13 years the Liberal government overtaxed Canadians.

The promise that this government made is that we will lower taxes. We asked Canadians what the most efficient way would be to lower the taxes. We asked what tax reduction would affect every Canadian. It became very clear that this government does want to lower taxes. During the 13 years of Liberal rule the taxes went up and up. Canadians are overtaxed. That is one of the reasons that Canadians wanted a change in government. We listened. Canadians said to reduce the GST. I have heard so often that Canadians would like to see the GST gone. That was a promise made and a promise broken by the previous government.

We are going to lower the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%. The GST is a tax that everybody pays. Thirty-two per cent of Canadians do not pay any income tax, but everybody pays the GST. If we want to be fair, if we want to have the best tax reduction for every Canadian, then we should reduce the GST. That is what we are going to do. That is what Canadians want.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is regarding the debate on child care which is going on right across the country.

I am really disappointed with the Conservative platform. For the life of me I cannot understand what a payment of \$1,200 has to do with child care.

In Canada we have the national child tax benefit. For the past 10 years it has paid money to lower income families. It has been very welcome. If the \$1,200 was an increase in that, I certainly would welcome it myself. My only problem with it would be it would be money better spent by the government if it were means tested.

How could a payment of \$1,200 possibly be classified as child care?

The Address

Mr. Mark Warawa: Mr. Speaker, my wife and I were blessed with five children. We now have two and one-half grandchildren; one is in the cooker. We love children. My children are grown now and range from 21 to 31 years of age. They are trying to raise families of their own and buy a house. Things are incredibly expensive. It is not like it was when I bought my first house for \$23,000 in 1973. Things are so expensive.

We have held round tables across the country to ask how we can help families. Parents have said that they want a choice in child care. Not everybody agrees with that, but the vast majority want a choice in child care. It may be providing child care through an organized child care service, it may be mom or dad wants to stay at home, or it may be a relative or a loved one of a friend, but parents need a choice in child care. It will not pay the total costs of child care, but it will substantially help parents who want a choice. This is what Canadians have asked for and this is what we have given them.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to participate in this debate on the Speech from the Throne.

• (1135)

[*English*]

Before I begin my remarks, I would like first to thank the voters in Etobicoke North for expressing their confidence in me again in the election on January 23. It is a great honour and trust that they have bestowed upon me, for the fifth time I might add. I will respect that trust and work at my utmost to represent them well here in the House of Commons.

Let me take this opportunity as well to thank the many volunteers who worked with me on the election campaign. Their efforts are very greatly appreciated.

I would like also to express my grief and sorrow in relation to two recent and separate incidents, first to the friends and family of Bhupinder Singh Khroad and Ravinder Jit Kaur Khroad who were tragically involved in a fatal motor vehicle accident recently. I extend my thoughts and prayers to all of them as they mourn their loss.

To the friends and relatives of the four Canadian soldiers killed on Saturday in Afghanistan: Corporal Matthew Dinning, Lieutenant William Turner, Bombardier Myles Mansell and Corporal Randy Payne. We all share their grief and can assure them that these brave men did not die in vain. They gave unselfishly to their country for the cause of freedom and the struggle against terrorism.

Let me turn now to the Speech from the Throne. It is 12 pages in length and is not exactly a difficult read. It lays out five priorities of the Conservative government. I understand well the idea of focusing on a few issues, but this, it seems to me, to be taking it to new limits.

[*Translation*]

At any rate, the five priorities that the Conservative party touted during its election campaign—along with many other promises that did not appear in the Speech from the Throne—do not offer the Canadian public a very sound official policy.

[*English*]

Let me cite just three examples. One is to reduce the GST. It is well known that it is three times more beneficial to the economy to have income tax cuts of equivalent amounts. That was the Liberal plan and was tabled in the House. Now the Conservative government will reduce those income tax reductions to implement the cut in the GST. We know this is not good for Canadians. It may be politically popular, but it is not the best solution for Canadians.

The Conservative Party approach to child care is misguided, in my judgment. Its plan to provide the parents of each young child with \$1,200 annually, while politically attractive to some, does not constitute a child care program. It is more like the old baby bonus scheme which was disbanded long ago. The Liberal government replaced it in the 1990s with the national child benefit. The national child benefit program is delivering about \$10 billion annually to medium and modest income families. The \$1,200 could be added to this and the child care agreements negotiated with the provinces and territories by the Liberal government should be respected. This would offer real child care support for working parents.

While I support tougher action against crime and criminals, and in fact the Liberal government tabled a series of responses to the plague of gun violence before the last Parliament was dissolved for the election, scrapping the gun registry would be a serious mistake. The gun registry, although certainly not a panacea to deal with gun violence, is supported by Canada's police chiefs and also by the Canadian Professional Police Association. These are the rank and file police officers. Law enforcement officers across the country are making 6,000 inquiries per day to the gun registry. Surely this is telling us that the police find the gun registry to be a useful tool.

The annual cost to operate the gun registry is now at a level of \$20 million per year or less. While I acknowledge the high cost to develop this system, which has been exaggerated in the House and elsewhere, the system is now developed, in place and is costing less than \$20 million a year.

Likewise, tougher sanctions against criminals in and of themselves will not be enough. We need to build on our investments in the community based national crime prevention program and programs like breaking the cycle, which operates in my riding of Etobicoke North. This program helps young people extricate themselves from gangs, and it is working.

Ministers in Prime Minister Harper's cabinet have been told to stay on message and stick to the five priorities laid out in the Speech from the Throne.

[*Translation*]

As the Liberal party critic for natural resources, I have to wonder how Mr. Harper's policy on staying on message will play out. Furthermore, the terms "natural resources" and "agriculture" appear only once in the Speech from the Throne, which includes no clear ideas on either of these subjects.

The Address

This is pretty unbelievable, given that natural resources and related industries represent 13% of Canada's GNP and provide jobs for nearly a million Canadians. Contrary to popular belief, these jobs are located in both rural and urban areas.

We can only hope that the budget about to be tabled will take into account the major impact of the natural resources sector on the entire Canadian population.

• (1140)

[English]

Coming back to the focussed messaging that Conservative ministers apparently are working under, what will this mean for the Minister of Natural Resources when he meets with Canada's mining industry? Will he describe the party's plan for child care or will he be permitted to dialogue on the severe labour shortages looming in Canada's mining industry and the need for incentives to encourage more exploration and development in Canada's mining industry?

When the Minister of Natural Resources meets with representatives from Canada's forest industry, will he describe to them the get tough on crime initiatives proposed by the Conservative government, or will he be permitted to dialogue with them about what his government will do to resolve the long-standing softwood lumber dispute with the United States and what action the Conservative government will take to ease the burden on the softwood lumber industry, its workers and the communities affected? Our Liberal government had announced a relief package of some \$1.5 billion, as interim assistance, until the dispute was finally settled in Canada's favour. Now we have some ministers on the government side saying that we are not going to win this dispute. Shame on them.

When the Minister of Natural Resources meets with the energy dialogue group, will he describe to them the proposed reduction in the GST, or will the Prime Minister allow the minister to explore with them the need for an energy strategy or national energy framework for Canada? Will he be able to discuss how the government will address such critical issues as energy conservation and energy efficiency? Will the minister be provided enough slack to discuss the Mackenzie Valley and Alaska pipeline projects, or will he digress into one of the other five priorities of the government, being very careful of course not to stray off message?

When the Minister of National Resources meets with environmental groups, will he discuss the government's new accountability package? Will he be able to respond to their questions when they ask what Canada's plans are to deal with greenhouse gas emissions and how those objectives will mesh with the development of the oil sands in Alberta? Will this type of discussion be permitted, or will special clearance be required from the Prime Minister if he wants to proceed in that way?

For the sake of our country and for all Canadians I hope the Minister of Natural Resources will be allowed to stray into these very important areas which, although not a priority obviously for the Conservative government, need the attention of all of us.

I look forward to the upcoming budget and other initiatives of the government. What was contained in the throne speech was pretty thin gruel and not enough to go on.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I would like to note that the hon. member is an experienced member of the House. I did not want to interrupt him in the volley of his oratory, but he did name a right hon. member in this House. I would like that member and all members not to test the Chair by doing this again. You might also want to advise your wordsmiths and legislative assistants about this ruling. Thank you very much.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Nanaimo—Alberni.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure we will all want to take that admonition to heart.

With all due respect to my hon. colleague opposite, for whom I have a great deal of respect, I am a little disappointed at some of the rhetoric he has thrown into his response to the Speech from the Throne with regard to two particular issues: first, he called the Conservative child care approach misguided; and second, his comments on the gun registry.

First, with regard to the child care plan, I am surprised that the member continues to tout what Canadians themselves, parents of young children, have said when asked what type of child care they prefer for their children. He continues to endorse and promote what Canadians rate as the fifth choice. Canadian parents prefer to manage their children as much as possible by themselves, or with a close family relative, or a neighbourhood day care, or a workplace-oriented day care. I am surprised the member would continue to ignore what statistics show us, which is Canadians prefer to have control of their child care.

Second, with regard the gun registry, the member referred to the great number of hits that the police have on the gun registry and how useful it is to them. Frankly, that information is so misused. We know that to get hits, every time officers stop cars for speeding, or for going through a stop sign or a red light, or for any check at all, they punch in the licence plate number and it automatically accesses the gun registry, which officers at the side of the road completely ignore. However, they get great numbers according to the hits on the registry. It is totally useless and misguided. How could they possibly have spent \$159 million on computers for a registry that has produced so little value to actual policing or reducing crime or violent gun crime in the country?

We have elderly citizens who are concerned. I had a man in my community approach me just this week on this subject. He has guns he inherited from a family member. He does not hunt himself, but they are family heirlooms. He is being told that if he does not register so far ahead of his birthday, not only will he lose his registry, he will have to go through the whole application again, and it will cost him another \$60 to register, if he can get the registry in on time.

Why would the member continue to endorse a program that everyone recognizes as a complete and utter failure?

The Address

•(1145)

Hon. Roy Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I am surprised the member for Nanaimo—Alberni did not take the opportunity to speak up and join me in a chorus to argue that the government needs to respond to the forestry workers in Canada with some help. I am sure there are many sawmills in the member's riding that are in terrible shape and many forestry workers who are badly affected. In fact, I recall his colleague, the member from Vancouver Island, who is no longer in the House, argued very strenuously for a relief package. I know the member for Nanaimo—Alberni did as well, but I am saddened by his silence on this issue in the House.

However, let me come back to the points that he has raised. First, I am glad he acknowledged that the gun registry cost \$159 million to develop and build. That is the figure the member quoted in the House. I know members on the other side have talked about a much bigger number to develop the gun registry. In fairness to the member, we know that is not right. It is higher than that, but it certainly is not as high as many of the members here purport.

The point is that in finance and economics, there is a concept called sunk cost. If we build a house and it costs too much to build, but now it is energy efficient and it is what we can afford, do we burn the house down because it cost us too much? Of course not. We look at what that house does for us today. What I am saying is that house, that gun registry, is costing less than \$20 million a year. It is supported by every police association in Canada and they are making use of it day in and day out.

Regarding child care, if that is the way the member for Nanaimo—Alberni feels, that this is a test of the Canadian public to their child care proposal, I wonder if his government plans to put that particular proposal to the floor of the House. I not sure, based on what I heard from the leader of the Bloc Québécois, that they support the \$1,200 a year baby bonus scheme. I am pretty sure that members on this side do not support it. I am quite sure the NDP does not support it. If he is saying that Canadians support it, does his government plan to table that in the House the way it stands now? I think they would be sadly disappointed with the result.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Ahuntsic.

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, earlier I was listening to the hon. government member speak to us about crime. I heard about increasing the number of police officers, biometric cards and DNA. What the member was talking about was a police state. My question is for the hon. member who is not a member of the government—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I am afraid the hon. member may not have understood that the question period for the previous member has now ended. We have resumed debate and I have recognized you as the next speaker. I invite you to resume the debate.

•(1150)

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Mr. Speaker, I apologize. I did not realize that the period for questions for the hon. member was over. You have caught me by surprise but I will come at it from another direction.

I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

As all Quebeckers must realize, this is my first speech here in the House. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the people of Ahuntsic for placing their trust in me. I would also like to thank my family for their love and support, especially my parents, my brothers and sisters, my husband Ibrahim and my son Christopher.

I would also like to thank all of the Bloc Québécois supporters in the riding of Ahuntsic. I am here today thanks to their hard work. I also send my regards to my team, currently holding the fort in our constituency office. I would also like to acknowledge my former colleagues at CSST, who made it possible for me to be with you here today. Finally, I would like to extend my warmest regards to the Lebanese and Arab communities in Quebec and Canada, and to the people of Lebanon, which I am proud to say is my country of birth, and to those from my home town of Akkar.

I chose Quebec because it offers a good environment in which to achieve the hope of peace and solidarity. I can now say that it also feels good to be chosen by the people there. I will therefore try to prove myself worthy of my fellow citizens' kindness and of the political ideals that I share with my party.

As the ancient Romans said, "*scripta manent*", which means, "what is written endures". Wise people have long known that what is written endures; it follows us and we are judged by what we write.

During the last election campaign, the Prime Minister send a letter to the Feminist Alliance for International Action. The letter stated, and I will quote in English:

[*English*]

Yes, I'm ready to support women's human rights and I agree that Canada has more to do to meet its international obligations to women's equality.

If elected, I will take concrete and immediate measures, as recommended by the United Nations, to ensure that Canada fully upholds its commitments to women in Canada.

[*Translation*]

He made a commitment to take concrete and immediate measures, as recommended by the UN, to support women's rights.

As we all know, the Prime Minister was elected. The women of Quebec and Canada are now waiting for him to take the concrete and immediate measures he referred to, as the UN recommended. The Speech from the Throne is silent on these measures, which the Prime Minister promised in writing. By signing the letter, what did the Prime Minister pledge to do?

In 1979, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which is also known as the treaty for women's rights.

In 1981, Canada ratified this convention. Twenty-five years later, women still suffer discrimination.

The Address

In 2003, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women released its report on Canada. It reads in part as follows:

While appreciating the federal Government's various anti-poverty measures, the Committee is concerned about the high percentage of women living in poverty, in particular elderly women living alone, female lone parents, aboriginal women... immigrant women and women with disabilities, for whom poverty persists or even deepens, aggravated by the budgetary adjustments made since 1995 and the resulting cuts in social services.

I will give a few examples of what the Prime Minister was committing to when he signed the letter. On the issue of violence against women, in paragraph 370, the UN committee asks Canada to “step up its efforts to combat violence against women and girls and increase its funding for women’s crisis centres and shelters.”

What, specifically, will the Prime Minister do about that? I wonder. As regards domestic help, the committee calls for, among other things, a quicker process to enable these household employees to obtain permanent residence. Another fine challenge for the Prime Minister.

In addition, as Ms. Asselin, the president of the Fédération des femmes du Québec, pointed out in an open letter that appeared in *La Presse* on December 23, the enshrinement of pay equity in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms some 30 years ago has not ensured that women working in businesses under federal jurisdiction enjoy pay equity.

For a number of years now, there has been consensus in Quebec on pay equity. Some 120,000 persons, primarily women, do not have pay equity, simply because they work for firms under federal jurisdiction. Therefore, in Quebec, 120,000 persons are paying the price because Quebec is not independent and master of its directions and its life choices. This lack of pay equity on the federal level leads me to make a comment for my fellow Quebecers on the relevance of sovereignty. The reason for sovereignty is all the more understandable, despite all that is involved, as is the reason we want to be independent. So, what will the Prime Minister do to honour his signature?

In the debate on Canada's presence in Afghanistan, on April 10, a number of ministers of this government justified it by an altruistic desire to protect the rights of women and children. The Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages said, and I quote:

In addition thanks to Canada's help, more than 4 million children, one-third of them girls, are registered in primary school. Canada is helping to bring concrete, lasting change to the living conditions of women and children in Afghanistan.

The Minister of National Defence said:

● (1155)

For Afghan women to have access to such services was simply unimaginable under the harsh Taliban regime. ...more than 4 million children, one-third of them girls, are registered in primary school.

In my opinion this government seems very sensitive to the cause of Afghan women and children and that makes me very happy.

I presume the same will be true for the women of Quebec and Canada. I also presume that the Prime Minister is a man of his word and that he will keep the promise he made in writing to the women of Quebec and Canada on December 18, 2005.

I will therefore support the Speech from the Throne, since I am an optimist and I have confidence in the word of the Prime Minister, who will, I am sure, go beyond the Speech from the Throne.

Furthermore, I am quite pleased that this government has shown its openness to addressing the fiscal imbalance, which is something we did not see with the previous government. Indeed, the previous government did not even recognize that there was a fiscal imbalance.

This apparent willingness to find fiscal arrangements gives hope. I do not intend to kill that hope.

The current government's desire to address crime is another important aspect of this speech. Nonetheless, we must not forget that criminal behaviour does require repression alone, but also rehabilitation and prevention.

I will close by saying that I will give the Prime Minister a chance to keep his word. In time, the men and women of Quebec and Canada will take notice of what he does and does not do. For now, we will give him the benefit of the doubt, but we are keeping our eyes wide open.

● (1200)

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member on her first speech in this House. She has expressed herself very well and with great clarity. Her presence in this House does honour to the values she speaks for, the role of women in society. I salute her.

I also hope that she will be able to reconcile work and family in her life, this being a reality that we all have to deal with.

In her speech, the member talked about aspirations of peace and solidarity. Those are also Quebec and Canadian values, which our soldiers are currently defending in Afghanistan, where we deplore the loss of human lives, such as we saw this past weekend. It is indeed in our interest to promote the spread of Canadian values in the world.

Our Minister of Defence went to Afghanistan where he toured the Canadian military bases. I was with him in Valcartier. He again told the soldiers how proud he was to see Canadians engaging courageously not only in humanitarian missions, but also in dangerous and complex missions, to defend those values.

In her speech, the member also talked about values and combating the poverty that often affects many women. She also said that she wanted the federal government to exhibit leadership, particularly on the question of pay equity.

I would therefore like to know what concrete measure she is proposing, to contribute specifically to advancing the cause she defends, the legislative emancipation of women by the Government of Canada.

The Address

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his words of encouragement. Indeed, the challenge facing every woman is to reconcile work and family. But I am fortunate to have women like Louise Harel and Pauline Marois, who have been examples of how to reconcile work and family, as my models.

In Quebec, we have a pay equity act; in Canada, we have the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Charter, in fact, gives women equity in terms of rights, but there is no Canadian pay equity law. For example, women who work in businesses governed by federal law do not have pay equity, while in Quebec we have made progress in this and we continue to fight for this right of women. Nonetheless, there is considerable room for improvement in everything. On the federal level, however, there is a kind of legal vacuum that means that women working in the broadcasting industry still do not have this equity.

Speeches saying that we are fighting for equity for women and that we have put rights into charters are all very well, but we are not seeing this in the facts, in those women's everyday lives. In fact, I will tell you what those women say: they are not seeing it.

• (1205)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member expressed some concern about poverty among seniors, particularly women. The member knows that the government has proposed to roll back a tax cut that was given to all Canadians in the last Parliament. Average Canadians would have benefited by about \$400 a year. To make up for that, an average Canadian family will now have to spend about \$40,000 simply to save \$400. It appears that Canadians are actually going to have a tax increase, not a tax decrease. I wonder if the member would care to comment on whether or not she is supportive of taking more money out of the hands of Canadian seniors.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I did not understand the question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I will allow a very short comment, because there is very little time left for this period of the day.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Mr. Speaker, how can we fight poverty? For example, Quebec has a law to help fight poverty. Quebec has put several measures in place to fight poverty among women, the elderly and so on. It is important that we understand our responsibility toward the people who elected us to represent them in this House.

Beyond fancy speeches and concrete measures, fiscal or otherwise, can we try to look at each group's specific needs and ask ourselves how we can help? Everyone knows that fiscal measures benefit only some of the people. Can we offer financial or fiscal help to these groups of women? This would be very good, because these women are always just barely surviving.

I would like the government to allocate some money to these women, to these groups, in its next budget.

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, allow me first to congratulate my colleague from Ahuntsic. She just expected to ask a question but actually delivered her maiden speech in the House. Speaking personally and on behalf of my colleagues, I

congratulate her because it was a fine speech. It did a good job of setting out the debate on the help and respect that women deserve in our society.

Allow me as well to thank my constituents in the riding of Abitibi—Témiscamingue. Again they expressed their confidence in me to represent them in the House and ensure that the ways in which Abitibi—Témiscamingue is different are recognized all across Canada and Quebec and that these differences are vigorously defended in the House, as they should be.

Getting down to the Speech from the Throne, allow me to point out that it was very predictable. We are glad, though, that it did not go on for more than 15 or 20 minutes because it was a redundant repetition of what we heard during the election campaign. This entirely predictable speech was based on the five great actions that the current government wishes to take.

We were glad to see two of the Bloc's proposals mentioned in the throne speech: international treaties will be ratified by the House and the government will apologize to Chinese immigrants for the head tax they had to pay. This is very important. During the last session, after sitting on the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, I sat as well on the Standing Committee on Justice, Human Rights, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness. We carried resolutions asking that apologies be made to the Chinese community, and they will be. The money reimbursed to them will not make them forget the mistakes of which they were the victims, but at least it will make them feel welcome in Canada.

Let us look now at the five priorities on which the government based its Speech from the Throne. It will probably base all its policies on them in this Parliament, and especially its budget speech, to be delivered in the next few days.

Insofar as accountability is concerned, the Bloc was already talking in 2001 about the crisis surrounding the sponsorship scandal, which cost the previous government a great many seats in Quebec. The last word still remains to be written, though, because the courts have yet to pass sentence on people who abused the system.

We obviously need an accountability act. However, this bill casts a very wide net, too wide perhaps. We will see. Our suggestion is that the government should work together with the opposition parties on consideration in committee of the bill and its implementation. The bill was just introduced in the last few days and will have to be studied in committee. It has more than 200 sections, and we will see how the committee manages. It is a huge bill, but it is hard to be against virtue itself.

Finally, there is day care. The Bloc's first reaction is to tell the current government that it is good, it is a fine idea. It must be said, though, that we have had this in Quebec for quite a few years now.

• (1210)

Thanks to the Parti Québécois, Quebec endowed itself with the best day care system in Canada. In the words of the former Prime Minister of Canada, Mr. Chrétien, it is probably one of the best in the world. So it must not be cut back.

The Address

We sincerely believe that, in the next budget speech and in the Speech from the Throne, the government must ensure that Quebec is compensated and deserves to be compensated. We calculate that the daycare centres of Quebec will lose \$807 million if the government introduces the \$1,200. Our leader has emphasized this, and I will repeat what he said. We have no objection to the \$1,200, far from it. However, three things are important.

First, the government did not mention that this \$1,200 would be taxable, and that will create all sorts of problems. Second, in Quebec in particular, this amount of \$1,200 will be deductible from income security benefits, that is, welfare. That \$1,200 will not be very good for people in need. Third, we suggest that the government revisit its idea of \$1,200 and maybe offer it as a tax deduction or tax credit. We shall see how it is treated in the budget. What is certain is that the Bloc Québécois will fight to see that Quebec's jurisdictions are respected, particularly in this matter. It will be very important for Quebec to receive its fair share.

Very quickly, I would also like to talk about wait times. The government has to be careful, because health is a field of provincial jurisdiction. It will have to respect provincial jurisdictions before implementing any program whatsoever, especially in the area of health and wait times.

Let us also talk about security and justice. I want to speak about this because, in the previous Parliament, I was a member of the Standing Committee on Justice. The party now in power, which was in opposition at that time, presented various ideas—which I will not venture to list—for draconian increases to sentences and for minimum prison sentences. To such ideas, we say no. No, because that would be using the Criminal Code to do the work of judges. Yes, there are ways of issuing directives, of inviting the courts to give serious consideration to possibly increasing sentences. Take for example the Coffin decision which was just rendered by the Quebec Court of Appeal. Mr. Coffin pleaded guilty to defrauding the government in the sponsorship scandal. The trial court had sentenced him to about two years less a day plus community service. The Court of Appeal has just revised this decision, in the wake of popular pressure and the notice of appeal filed by the Crown, and has imposed a prison term.

With all due respect, I would like to advise the party in power to be very careful before tabling bills of this nature. The right wing in Canada is not enjoying very good press at the moment. Criminals are not going to be deterred by minimum prison sentences. I know whereof I speak, for prior to June 28, 2004, I was a criminal litigator for 25 years. For the last 15 of those years, I worked in criminal law only. As I told the members of the standing committee, imposing long prison terms is not the solution; rehabilitation, on the other hand, is very important. It is true, however, that we should perhaps take another look at suspended sentences.

• (1215)

We could examine excessively hasty probation and releases.

In closing—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I apologize for interrupting the hon. member, but we are now in the period set aside for questions and comments.

The hon. member for Louis-Hébert.

Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague on the other side of the House said that we have axed day care services. He also spoke about a fair share for Quebeckers. He talked about a whole slew of fine things.

I noted the statistics. Perhaps my colleague is not aware of all he could draw on to state whether day care services will really be axed or whether Quebec will receive its fair share.

It is a fact that the federal government must pay the Government of Quebec some \$240 million annually. Divided by \$1,200, this amount represents the payment of an allowance to some 200,000 children. On April 1, the number of children in day care centres, CPEs or other Quebec government institutions passed the 200,000 mark. Finally, as we say at home, it amounts to trading four quarters for a dollar. We are a long way from axing these services and depriving Quebeckers of their fair share.

In addition, there are not 200,000 children under the age of five in Quebec, but rather 378,000, which represents some \$440 million for Quebec. That means nearly \$200 million more in the pockets of Quebeckers. On top of that, the allowance now covers children aged 6 and under, which adds some 72,000 children. And so the figure becomes over \$500 million, which is practically double the amount provided for in the previous plan.

I would like to know where the problem is.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Speaker, the problem is quite clear. When you send \$1,200 to an individual so their child can go to a day care, there has to be a day care for the child to go to. Therein lies the problem.

Child care allowances of \$1,200 are going to be handed out. That is fine. However, there may be other means of distributing this money. We are not against the idea. At first glance, it seems interesting. However, these funds should be given out as a tax credit. That is the difference.

For example, I know a stay-at-home mother who is raising two young children. Her husband is an orthopaedic surgeon. She earns \$5,000 and her husband earns \$300,000. She will be entitled to an allowance of \$1,200 per child for a total of \$2,400. With all due respect, that is the problem in my opinion.

The government must be careful. We do not think it is a bad idea, but a balance needs to be struck. We already have a day care system in place. Some serious thinking needs to be done.

One solution would be to correct the fiscal imbalance. I hope that my colleague opposite will push for a solution to this fiscal imbalance as promised.

The Address

• (1220)

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member referred to wait time guarantees in the health system. Benchmarks are fine to establish, I think, but a guarantee does require sudden encroachment into provincial jurisdiction. I wonder if the member would care to comment on whether or not he sees providing wait time guarantees as viable under the current arrangements.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Speaker, my initial response is that the issue should be examined very carefully.

It seems obvious to me that there is an attempt to become involved in an area that is clearly under provincial jurisdiction, and that is health. In our opinion, the money should be given to the provinces, along with the mandate to reduce wait times. In this way, we could solve part of the problem.

The provinces—in particular Quebec—must determine for themselves how they will reduce wait times. In Ontario, wait times may not be the same as in Quebec or British Columbia. It all depends on the type of surgery. This should all be discussed in a debate.

[English]

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Simcoe North.

I would like to dedicate this, my maiden speech, to my father, Mark Lake, who passed away three years ago this week. Given my lack of political involvement during his lifetime, he would not have dreamt for a second that I would today have this great honour and yet I can scarcely imagine being here had it not been for his wisdom and influence in my life.

It is my tremendous pleasure to stand here on behalf the people of Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont. As this is my first time speaking in the House, I would like to take a few moments to express some appreciation. First, I want to thank God for the experiences in my life, even the hard ones, that have prepared me for this moment and those that will follow.

I thank my family, my wife Debi and my kids Jaden and Jenae, for embarking with me on this family adventure. I want to thank my mom, Bonnie, for showing me by her daily example what it means to put others before oneself, and my grandma, Eleanor Lake, for giving me my dad and for teaching him to be the amazing father that he was.

I thank all of my constituents, of course, regardless for whom they voted, for making our little piece of Canada such a wonderful place to live. My constituency is a perfect snapshot of capturing what makes Canada the greatest country in the world: a mix of urban and rural; French and English; blue collar and white collar; and truly multicultural, with 30% of the population being from a visible minority.

This constituency is also representative of the Canada-wide recognition that we need to change the way we govern this country if it is to remain great. On January 23 the people of Edmonton—Mill

Woods—Beaumont, who had elected a Liberal in each of the last four elections, voted Conservative by a 17,000 vote margin.

At this time I would like to recognize the man who served Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont prior to the last election, a dedicated and well-respected parliamentarian for 26 years, the Hon. David Kilgour. The reason the Liberals were able to hold on to the seat for so long is that David knew the importance of putting his constituents first and he had a heart for service. For that, he will always be held in high regard by the people back home.

I will move on to talk about the Speech from the Throne in a moment but first I want to acknowledge a group of Canadians who are close to my heart. They, like myself, are parents of young children with autism. My son Jaden is 10 years old now and was diagnosed with autism when he was two. I would like those parents to know that I have been where they are. I have experienced the same emotions that they are experiencing right now: the intense love that a parent has for his or her child; the fear that accompanies the discovery that there is something different about the way the child is developing; the hope of finding out that there is a treatment that is helping other children with similar challenges; and the utter frustration and disappointment as time ticks away while the child waits for that treatment.

I am also fortunate enough to have lived in a province that has made treating autism a priority. I absolutely believe that my son is a different person because of the behavioural therapy that he has received over the past eight years.

While it seems clear that the responsibility for providing the treatment programs children with autism so desperately need lies with the provinces and territories, I want those parents to know that I will do everything that I can to promote action to the full extent that the federal government can play a role within its area of authority.

Now I would like to talk about the five main priorities of this new government, starting with the revolutionary new federal accountability act and accountability in general.

A lot of people have asked me what it was that drove me to leave my business career with the Edmonton Oilers Hockey Club to get involved in a life of politics. Over the past several years I have been growing increasingly disillusioned and frustrated with the disastrous combination of high taxation and the lack of both stewardship and vision on the part of the previous Liberal government.

A quote by Alexander Hamilton sums up my feelings and I think those of many Canadians who have started to wake up just in time to what has been happening over the past 13 years. He said, “Those who stand for nothing fall for anything”.

With this Speech from the Throne we finally have a government that is prepared to stand up for something, a government that recognizes what so many Canadians already know: that as great a country as Canada is we could be so much better.

Accountability is not something to be feared unless one is hiding something. In fact, most business managers would tell us that a well-planned and straightforward budget and a good set of rules to monitor and govern it are actually very freeing.

The Address

When I was the director of ticket sales with the Oilers, I had to submit and then operate within an expense budget for my department. On a fairly regular basis I would sit down with our vice-president of finance to ensure we were running smoothly according to the rules we had set out. I enjoyed this process because I knew that I was being a good steward of the company's money and it was important to me that the shareholders were comfortable with that knowledge as well.

Here our shareholders are all Canadians and they deserve to have that same level of accountability, that same comfort level, and that is what the federal accountability act is all about.

The second of the five priorities mentioned in the Speech from the Throne is the commitment to reduce the GST immediately from 7% to 6% and then eventually to 5%. As has been mentioned several times in this House but seems to be conveniently ignored by those across the floor is the fact that this is a tax cut that will benefit every taxpayer in the country, including those at the lowest income levels who do not make enough money to pay income taxes in the first place.

•(1225)

This is a tax cut that people will see every day and it cannot be taken away by stealth while they are out working hard to make ends meet. Most important, it is a clear, unambiguous step in the right direction for all Canadians.

The third of the five priorities in the Speech from the Throne is a promise to make the safety of our streets and our citizens a priority. As I have talked to people in my constituency, both during the election campaign and since, the topic of crime is consistently mentioned with almost unanimous support for the positions my party has laid out in this area. Citizens, as well as police and prosecutors, are sick and tired of the rights of criminals trumping the rights of law-abiding citizens. It is time to treat serious crime seriously. It sounds so ridiculously simple and yet we are constantly hearing about violent criminals receiving short or conditional sentences, often only to reoffend when they should still be in prison. That is clearly unacceptable.

I will skip the fourth of the five priorities, child care, but I will come back to it in a moment.

The fifth priority is the government's commitment to work with the provinces to establish a patient wait times guarantee. Along with accountability and crime, health care was one of the top three issues in my riding that people wanted to talk about on their doorsteps. There are many concerns but the general theme I heard was that the health care system was not working the way it should for the amount of money going into it. The complaints were almost never about the level of investment in the system. Rather, the conversation almost always centred around the return Canadians are getting in terms of service.

Canadians want and deserve a universal, publicly funded health care system that they can trust to be there for them when they need it. With our aging population, the demands on this system are only going to increase. It is good to see that we finally have a federal government that is making the health care of Canadians a priority.

I have purposely left until the end of my time the choice in child care plan because I want to give it the attention it deserves. Let me begin by saying that I do not begrudge parents choosing to send their children to day care. It is a choice that my wife and I have not made for our family but I have many friends and family members who are terrific parents and use day care.

I also want to point out that our choice in child care plan, unlike the Liberal plan, has a component whereby we will work with the provinces and territories, employers, community and non-profit organizations to create more child care spaces that meet the needs of ordinary Canadians.

During the election campaign I heard the former prime minister talk often about the Liberal day care plan as the first new social program in a generation. Backed by an army of government funded special interest groups, Liberals espoused the virtues of their sacred and "progressive day care plan", which blatantly left hundreds of thousands of Canadian families unfairly paying through their taxes to fund other families' child care choices.

To quote the view of C.S. Lewis on progress in general, which is a long quote but it captures the essence of this debate perfectly in my mind, he said:

We all want progress. But progress means getting nearer to the place you want to be and if you have taken a wrong turning, then to go forward does not get you any nearer. If you are on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; and in that case, the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive man.

To illustrate the difference between the two plans, I want to use the example of a family in my riding for whom I have tremendous respect, the Matychuk family. Jeff and Nancy Matychuk have five children ranging in age from 5 to 14. They are a one income family with one vehicle, a 12 year old minivan that does the job, usually. They live in Edmonton in a modest home with no garage. Jeff takes the bus to work, a one hour ride each way downtown, so that Nancy can have the van to move the kids around. Jeff's income last year was about \$39,000. The Matychuks do not use day care, institutional or otherwise, and their kids are as well-rounded, mature and social as any we could ever meet. This is a truly incredible family that has chosen to forego many of the luxuries we take for granted because they feel it is the best decision for their family and they do it gladly.

For the purpose of this illustration I want to pretend that Jeff and Nancy were just starting their family and that Amy, the 14 year old, was born this year. Under the Conservative choice in child care plan, over the next 15 years, until the youngest child turns six, the Matychuks would receive 36,000 after tax dollars to help with the costs of raising their family. Under the Liberal plan they would receive absolutely nothing. In fact, under the Liberal plan they would actually pay through their taxes to send their neighbours' kids to day care. That is simply unfair no matter how we look at it.

Thankfully, on January 23 Canadians voted for a well thought out and straightforward plan that will give real support and real choice to all Canadian families when it comes to child care.

I wish to take a moment to congratulate all members of the House on the honour that their constituents have bestowed on them. I look forward to working together with everyone here to ensure that Canada remains the greatest country in the world in which to live.

• (1230)

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my fellow member for his first speech in the House. He did a wonderful job of highlighting some of the important things that were put forward in the Speech from the Throne.

Would the member give the House a little clarification on the child care program? He gave examples of people in his own constituency who will now benefit from a change in the child care program. He talked about progress and about how the child care program that we are initiating on this side of the House will be progress. Will every parent receive the same benefit? Will it truly be an equal program whereas perhaps the programs in the past have not been equal and open to all citizens of Canada?

I come from a farming community where people are unable to access day care centres and centres where the funding has gone in the past. How will this program benefit people who live in rural Canada?

Mr. Mike Lake: Mr. Speaker, the Conservative child care plan will benefit all families equally across the country. Obviously the money follows the child so for every child under six years old the family will receive \$1,200 taxed in the hands of the lowest income earner in the family.

The second part of the program that often gets ignored is the plan to invest in actual child care spaces in the rural communities, as well as those day care spaces funded by community groups, not for profit groups and corporations.

• (1235)

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the member on his first speech in the House.

I was interested to hear him talk about his family's experience with autism and the fact that his son is someone who is living with autism. He mentioned that there were families on the Hill today to draw to the attention of Canadians the difficulties that families with autistic children face. I know they are pleased that he can bring that experience to the House.

We have heard about the need for a national autism strategy, research chairs in Canadian universities to research various treatments for autism and the importance of including autism treatment in our medicare program. The member said that he thought anything that could possibly be done at the federal level should be done.

Could the member comment on those three points which are often raised by families who have autistic children?

Mr. Mike Lake: Mr. Speaker, I am always glad to talk about autism and working to find solutions.

The Address

As for a national autism strategy, I absolutely think the country could use a national autism strategy. It is important that we do something to not only help the kids who have autism now but also to find a solution.

As for research, I am absolutely in favour of looking into ways the federal government can help aid in the research of autism. As a three month new member of Parliament I have to learn a little more about the ways in which this can be done but I look forward to learning everything that I can.

In terms of the Canada Health Act, my impression is that the Canada Health Act does not name any specific disorders or diseases. When it comes to the funding of treatment programs, like autism or any other health related disorders or diseases, they are provincial responsibilities. The role the federal government plays is what we are doing in terms of correcting things like the fiscal imbalance that has been allowed to grow over the last few years and to clarify the roles of the provinces versus the roles of the federal government.

However I look forward to working with the hon. member and his party who have really taken an interest in autism to find solutions for the problems that these families are facing.

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as this is my first address to the House I must say that it is a distinct honour and privilege to stand and represent the citizens of my riding in this place. I thank them for placing their confidence in me.

[*Translation*]

My thanks therefore go out to the citizens of Simcoe North.

• (1240)

[*English*]

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to my family, especially my wife Heather and our children, but also the family members who are continuing to manage the family business, giving me leave and the opportunity to serve our community in this most distinguished way.

My family emigrated to Simcoe North from England in 1874 and successive generations have fashioned their livelihoods from our small village on Sparrow Lake ever since. Simcoe North is a fairly prosperous and growing region, about an hour and a half drive north from Toronto, on the cusp of cottage country encompassing, as the name suggests, the northern half of the historic county of Simcoe. We have a mix of rural and agricultural businesses with a strong representation in the tourism and manufacturing industries to supply much of our primary employment.

We are home to the general headquarters of the Ontario Provincial Police and one of Ontario's most recent and modern correctional facilities. As members might imagine, law enforcement, crime and sentencing issues are very top of mind among a key group of residents in my riding.

Simcoe North is home to two first nations communities, Mnjikaning and Beausoleil, and a large Métis community. We are also proud to have one of the few French speaking communities in southern Ontario in the town of Penetanguishene in the southern Georgian Bay area.

The Address

As the greater Toronto area has grown, so too has Simcoe North. A growing number of people commute from our communities to work in or near Toronto and many more have moved to our area in recent times to enjoy their retirement years in the more peaceful and picturesque surroundings offered by Simcoe North. While my riding may enjoy relative prosperity, there is a growing sense that governments at all levels must act more honestly and decisively to bring real results, lower taxes, and spending only in the areas that matter most to Canadians.

It is with this backdrop that I support the agenda for this Parliament that we heard ever so eloquently from Her Excellency the Governor General on April 4. With this past election people were ready for change. They had their limit of theatrical politics, politics where words, announcements, re-announcements, scandal and photo ops overtook the real business of our nation and plunged the cynicism toward elected officials to a new high. On January 23 they voted for change and change is what they will receive.

I am pleased that the first act of the government was to introduce the federal accountability act tabled on April 11 to begin the process of making the government more effective, transparent and accountable to the people. I believe this bill will be the first important step in regaining the trust of Canadians in their federal government.

To reduce taxes we will cut the GST to 6% and then to 5%, giving the widest form of tax relief possible. This will provide tax relief even to the nearly 30% of Canadians who do not pay income taxes. I have heard from many in my riding in that category who reminded me clearly that income tax cuts would not help them to pay for their ever increasing energy costs, rent and living expenses.

As I referenced earlier, the government's commitment to crack down on crime, restrict the use of conditional sentencing, and direct more resources to law enforcement, border security and against the proliferation of illegal firearms will be welcome in Simcoe North.

I represent a riding where many of our well paying jobs are on shift work and a good many more are held by people who live in rural areas where day care does not exist. They, like most families, seek out child care solutions that suit their circumstances, whether it is a relative, a neighbour or, where permissible, a neighbourhood day care centre.

The \$1,200 per child under six that we pledged to them as a child care benefit will help. We know it will not completely pay, and they know it will not completely pay, for their child care, but it is far better to have that direct benefit in their hands than being lost in more government administration and programming that they may not even be able to seek out. They know this will help. They know they will have a choice.

As for the families that do have access to traditional day care services, I commend the efforts of professionals in the child care services area for developing programs like Ontario's best start program.

I encourage them to utilize the government's commitment to help maintain that program through to March 2007, and if best start proves to be successful, as it appears it will, then the Ontario

government has every right to continue it on its own. It is its jurisdiction and I hope it does.

Our commitment to create 25,000 new child care spaces each year over the next five years will clearly tie in well with the good work of Ontario child and family services programs.

Finally, I have spoken to people in my riding who have given up on the health care system, people who have chosen not to endure the pain in their knees or hips, for example. They have reached into their own pockets to pay for medical services in places such as Buffalo, New York, a two and a half hour drive from Simcoe North. For those who have that financial capability, it is an alternative and that is a sad indictment of our health care system.

Excessive wait times are at the root of the public's loss of faith in our once proud system. I am delighted to see the government's undertaking to address wait times with a guarantee. The guarantee is tangible. It goes beyond the usual flowery words on a page. It compels actions and sets consequences if or when services fall short of medically appropriate wait times.

This is the kind of action that will help Canadians to regain their faith in our system and be proud of it again. At this time, when public health care services are struggling to meet demand, it makes perfect sense that we consider a greater role for private health care providers inside the bounds of our universally publicly administered and publicly paid system. That will mean better service for patients and better value for their investment.

It is encouraging to see the provinces working in this vein already: in Quebec, Alberta and recently, even in my home province of Ontario. It goes to show that when we work together, we can bring timely access to quality care. That is what Canadians want from their health care system and it is the kind of cooperation they expect from both levels of government.

In closing, I am optimistic about what lies ahead for our country. In this focused and succinct plan for the 39th Parliament I see a way to move forward, to step forward in meaningful, measurable steps. These steps reflect the kind of change that Canadians seek, that they believe are priorities for themselves and their country: a well deserved break on taxes, safe communities, accountable good government, choice in child care, and probably for the first time, a guarantee of service in health care.

The Address

The priorities set out in the Speech from the Throne become even more poignant when balanced against their commitment to address fiscal imbalance, to engage our provincial and territorial partners in a more open brand of federalism, and to restore Canada's reputation as a dependable leader on the international stage.

I look forward in this Parliament to implement these priorities. I ask hon. members opposite to see the value and the benefit to all Canadians from this program, to get behind it and support it, and for the first time in too many years, bring concrete results for all Canadians to share.

• (1245)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about health care. Benchmarks have been established for critical areas already, but a wait time guarantee is a different issue totally. It means, all of a sudden, that the federal government is going to get involved in the delivery of health care which is a provincial jurisdiction.

It means that there is going to be either a massive transfer of additional moneys to the provinces to provide for guarantees, but the methodology of providing a guarantee would also involve transfers outside of a particular hospital to some other hospital in that province, or to another province, or even to the United States.

This is absolutely amazing because if we were to really think this through, we would understand that there are going to be problems no matter how it is done. What happens when a hospital decides to withdraw funding from certain critical areas so that it could top up, knowing that the federal government is just going to step in and pay for a guarantee of a benchmark that the hospital did not try to meet?

A massive change would have to occur and it would have to be in collaboration with the provinces. A decision will have to be taken whether or not this is just throwing money and saying that we have given the guarantee and if it happens, it happens. There must be consequences for not delivering and not meeting health care criteria and targets of best practices.

Maybe the member would like to get away from the rhetoric and the clichés and begin speaking a little bit about the challenges that would take place in terms of even delivering some sort of a guarantee.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right. It will take an intense amount of cooperation and work with provincial and territorial governments to put this type of wait time guarantee in place. That is well recognized.

The member should be reminded that of the \$41 billion over 10 years commitment by a government of which he was part of in the past Parliament, \$5.5 billion was set aside specifically for addressing the wait time issue. However, this is the kind of guarantee, kind of service and protocol that Canadians expect from their health care systems. It is just not good enough to put a bunch of words on a page and not be prepared to stand behind them.

I agree that it is going to take some cooperation. I believe that Canadians expect to see that kind of cooperation. Will it be always easy? Certainly not, but we need to begin that process now and work with our provincial and territorial partners as soon as possible to

deliver this kind of meaningful change for the Canadian health care system.

• (1250)

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Kenora.

As I begin my remarks, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the voters of Vancouver Centre for re-electing me for the fifth time as their member of Parliament. I promise that I will continue to represent their views to Ottawa and strive to be worthy of their trust. I also want to thank my sons for their absolute patience and support, and I want to thank all of the great Vancouver Centre volunteers.

My initial reaction to the Speech from the Throne was one of disappointment. After several weeks of reflection, I stand here today and admit that my first impression was absolutely correct.

The five priorities laid out in the government's speech are disappointingly long on rhetoric and short on substance. What is most disturbing for those of us who live in British Columbia is what was not said. There is nothing about Canada's critical workforce deficit, nothing about productivity, and nothing about research and development. And amazingly, from the first elected western Prime Minister in two decades, there is not a word about the west, not a word.

The Prime Minister defends his Speech from the Throne by saying that it focuses on the five priorities that his government promised during the election: cutting the GST; a new federal accountability act; reforms to the criminal justice system; a Conservative child care plan; and a plan to continue the previous government's initiative to reduce wait times at hospitals.

This is not enough. When these things are complete in about the next three weeks, what else is there? Where is the vision?

Traditionally, Speeches from the Throne are about vision and a long term plan that a government hopes to implement to move the nation forward positively and address the concerns and challenges facing the country.

Maybe this tiny vision means that the Prime Minister does not expect to be here for a long time. However, let us deal with what we have: the five priorities.

Priority number one is the government's short-sighted and risky GST cut. The Prime Minister appears determined to forge ahead with his GST cut despite every serious economist in the country agreeing that it is poor public policy and a misuse of about \$4.5 billion in federal fiscal flexibility every year. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives estimates that families earning over \$150,000 a year will receive an average of over \$2,000 in savings, while families earning less than \$40,000, which is almost half of all Canadians, will receive a mere \$163 after taxes.

Once again, we see that a leopard never changes its spots. A Conservative government, no matter what its new name is, favours the wealthy over low income Canadians.

Priority number two is a new federal accountability act. This is motherhood. Who could object? But on close examination, it is evident that this bill is nothing but a hollow shell.

The Address

Let us not forget that it was the last Liberal government that put in place the infrastructure for accountability by severely limiting individual and corporate political contributions and third party election spending. We brought in whistleblower legislation and new accountability guidelines for crown corporations.

This bill, however, would do nothing to prevent the revolving door between political staffers and lobbyists, something the Conservatives talked about non-stop when they were in opposition.

There is no mention of putting an end to lobbyists working for the government, where conflict of interest is an even greater concern. When we see, however, that the Conservative defence minister was a former lobbyist for the defence industry, it is not surprising that this has been left out of the bill.

Some of my constituents have pointed out that we should have expected these hidden surprises. From the moment the Prime Minister was sworn in, he developed sudden amnesia with regard to his campaign promises of openness, transparency and accountability.

First, he appointed an unelected Conservative backroom boy to cabinet and in one of the most sensitive portfolios as well. The minister, now a senator, can never stand in the House and be accountable for any of his decisions. Second, before the metaphorical ink was dry on the ballots in Vancouver Kingsway, the current Minister of International Trade leapt with dizzying haste from the party under which he was elected to the party that received only 18% of voter support.

Canadians have become cynical and embittered about politicians. The only feeling of empowerment they have in this democratic nation is that vote during an election when they can show their approval or their disapproval, so this lack of respect for the voter is beyond arrogance.

● (1255)

Priority number three is to get tough on crime. In spite of the fact that crime rates went down 12% under the last Liberal government, the Conservatives have taken a new, punitive approach of hanging them high and hanging them long, locking them up and throwing away the key, an approach that runs contrary to all research. In fact, this approach would lead to a dramatic increase in the number of prisoners, which experts believe could mean building up to 23 new prisons. Let us think of the billions of dollars that will cost. In addition, the Prime Minister will abolish the gun registry, against the wishes of law enforcement professionals.

So who does the Prime Minister listen to? Not the experts, certainly not the research, and obviously not the police.

Priority number four is child care: \$4 a day, after taxes, to care for our children. In my riding, that cannot not even buy a latte.

Where is the choice? This has nothing to do with early learning. What an insult to Canadian families and what a disservice to their children.

Priority number five is hospital wait times. It is said that imitation is the highest form of flattery, and I thank the government for adopting the last Liberal government's plan to send patients to other facilities for care if wait times are too long. I think this is a

controversial issue at best. My colleague recently brought it up. However, what is interesting is that, with typical Conservative spin, this is now going to be one of the most costly ways of delivering health care. Our plan was to send patients to different parts of Canada. The Conservative plan is to send patients to the U.S., where the same service costs almost 10 times more. Did anyone do a cost benefit analysis on this? No wonder Conservative governments rack up deficits.

I cannot end this speech without pointing out so many issues of concern to Canadians, issues that were not in the Speech from the Throne, a speech deafening in its silence on these issues.

There is silence on B.C.'s Pacific gateway strategy.

There is silence on affordable housing. Will the government continue negotiations with provinces on the \$1.5 billion national housing program that our previous government started?

There is silence on seniors. Will the government implement our plan for reverse mortgages, the \$50 million new horizons for seniors program, the caregiver tax credit increase to \$15,000, and the expanded EI compassionate care program?

There is silence on productivity, on workplace issues and on post-secondary education and training.

There is silence on immigration and on internationally trained workers.

I could go on about the lack of substance in this Speech from the Throne, but as I said at the beginning, what an opportunity wasted. It is such a disappointment.

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate you on your appointment.

I thank the member for Vancouver Centre for sharing her time with me today.

I am grateful for the opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne, but I would first like to thank the residents of the riding of Kenora, who have returned me for the second time. It was a challenging election in which I managed to learn many things from the residents. I would like to thank them.

I would also like to thank my wife Carole, my daughters Sheena and Megan, and my son Cody for putting up with my new career. It can be challenging in a riding the size of mine.

The riding of Kenora is unique in many ways, both in its geography and its demographics, but essentially the people of Kenora share the concerns of the majority of Canadians.

They are concerned about their jobs. In our riding, forestry is the industry in crisis.

They are concerned with access to quality services, such as options for child care and services for seniors.

They are concerned with the protection of our health care system while ensuring that the system is improved.

The Address

They are also concerned about the future of our environment.

We have faced many challenges over the last couple of years. We have had significant job losses in Kenora, Dryden and other areas. In Kenora, Abitibi Consolidated announced the closure of its mill just before Christmas. We lost over 400 jobs. In the community of Dryden, almost 500 jobs have been lost in the last few years; when we consider that the plant had 1,100 workers just a few short years ago, we can see the devastating impact. Kenora had over 900 workers, but in just a few short years the mill has been closed entirely. We have a lot of difficulties.

As well, Sioux Lookout, Ignace and Ear Falls have all lost opportunities whereby small contractors are no longer able to maintain their businesses. These are communities where forestry is the sole industry. The situation is more important than partisan posturing. All sides of the House must provide leadership as we try to address this issue.

For the last two years I have been travelling throughout the riding listening to people's concerns. While priorities differ slightly, there is a common theme. People want their government to act responsibly as they want to secure a better future for themselves and their children. This is their priority. Unfortunately, the Conservatives' Speech from the Throne falls far short.

I am honoured to represent more than 38 first nations communities. Those 38 first nations were looking for a throne speech commitment for the Kelowna accord.

I was looking to the speech for the families of Sandy Lake, where the housing shortage is extreme. It is not uncommon to find more than 10 people living in a two-bedroom home. We hear of many instances where more than 20 people are sharing a larger home, an overcrowded home that is in desperate need of renovation. The Kelowna accord would have started to address some of the severe housing shortages that exist in all these communities I represent.

I was looking to the speech for the Chief of Neskantaga First Nation, Peter Moonias, hoping that the serious water concerns in his community would be addressed. I represent a riding where many first nations are under boil water advisories. This is a serious concern that will not be addressed by changing one or two regulations. Money must be invested in training. In my riding, the Keewaytinook Okamakanak Centre of Excellence is a leader in the training of water treatment plant operators. Centres like these must be supported by our government to ensure that all Canadians have access to safe drinking water.

I was looking to the speech for the children of the Fort Severn First Nation on the Hudson Bay coast, where the children have been unable to use their school due to mould problems. The children do not have a safe environment in which to learn.

I represent a riding where the complexities of education in a remote area with language barriers have not been properly addressed. Our kids are not staying in school. This must change. The Kelowna accord would have addressed the unique needs of first nations children to give them the tools they need to contribute to our society, and we need their contributions.

I was looking to the speech for the survivors of residential schools. We have taken steps to address the wrong done to our first people. We must be vigilant in ensuring that the agreement is kept. It was a tragic time in our history and it took us far too long to acknowledge it. We must live up to the agreement with all survivors, starting now. In many of the communities I visit, survivors are lined up at the airports to ask me questions. As a sign of respect they have been there to meet me, and out of respect they are asking questions that they want answered.

I was looking to the speech for the young people of my riding, many of whom have been victims of suicide. First nations communities must be given support to address this growing crisis. We must give our young people hope. We must act now. Let us learn from our mistakes in the past and prevent the tragedy from growing in scale. I urge the government to acknowledge it and to work on prevention.

I have worked with the leaders of the aboriginal communities, who have educated me on the needs of their people. Grand Chief Arnold Gardner, for Treaty 3, and Grand Chief Stan Beardy, for Treaty 9, have worked tirelessly to advocate on behalf of their communities. I urge the government to listen to their advice.

● (1300)

I have also worked with members of the unions representing workers who have faced unemployment due to the forestry crisis. I have worked with the municipal leaders such as Mayor David Canfield of Kenora, Mayor Anne Krassilowsky of Dryden and Mayor Jim Desmarais of Ear Falls and many other communities. They are all struggling to diversify their economies. I worked with my colleagues, as chair of the Liberal forest caucus, to propose measures to address the situation, and I was able to participate in announcing the \$1.5 billion package for forestry aid. This started to address many of hurdles that are hurting the industry.

I was looking to this speech for the people directly and indirectly affected by the crisis. The government must act to help these families and communities that have been devastated with total job loss, again in small town northern Ontario. Although I am hopeful that the softwood lumber dispute will be resolved, it is contributing to the overall situation. There are many more issues that must be addressed. High energy prices have been crippling the mills in our area. Support for the new and existing energy sources is essential and should have been addressed in the Speech from the Throne.

The Address

We also support the industry with research initiatives in order to diversify the output of our mills. The investment in value-added project would be an example. The importance of the forestry industry is a national concern and must be treated as such if we want to be a leader in the global market. Policies must be developed to ensure the sustainability of the industry. Forestry was not mentioned in the Speech from the Throne, and I urge the new government to make it a priority.

Compounding this issue is a concern by our communities that our tourism industry will not be sustained due to the new passport requirements introduced by the United States. My constituents are concerned about the decline of the tourism industry once restrictions are put in place. I would remind the House that these are communities that have lost their sole employer and have been devastated. Some estimates say that up to 40% of the tourist traffic in our area could be limited or restricted due to this new regulation. We must have a strategic and coordinated effort as to how we will deal with this change and we must be very aggressive in educating our tourist operators on the requirement to reduce the negative impact of this policy.

I was born in northwestern Ontario. As all Canadians, we are a proud people and our way of life is important to us. In this way it was important for us when the governments of the past recognized the contribution of our area to the rest of the country and were willing to support our communities by way of FedNor. The current government's lack of commitment to this important department concerns me.

Regional development is not about subsidizing people, but recognizing the importance our regions and their impact on the overall economy and culture of our country. Without mention of regional development in the Speech from the Throne, I challenge the government to instill confidence in northern Ontario by maintaining the current funding levels for these programs in these communities.

Many of my constituents have written to me about another of their priorities, which I will quickly mention. As part of the make poverty history campaign, many of my constituents have identified Canada's implicit responsibility to assist the poor at home and abroad. They urge the government to increase its share of foreign aid to the 0.7% commitment. I thank the constituents of those communities for that advice.

This last week has been very interesting. I travelled over 2,000 kilometres on a very short visit to the northern part of my riding, and not even at the extreme edges. I travelled to the northern parts of my riding, sitting with constituents from some of the most isolated communities in Canada. I travelled to Bearskin Lake where Chief Rodney McKay informed me of the community's concerns about the lack of housing. I travelled to Keewaywin where Chief Joe Meekis expressed frustration with the process required to apply for badly needed funding. I was hosted by Chief Archie Meekis at Deer Lake. He expressed concern about the falling apart police station in which they had to hold people. I travelled to Slate Falls where an elderly lady held my hand and anguished over the residential school issue. I visited Wunnumin Lake where Chief Archie Wabasse said that they were interested in exploring a restorative justice program.

Although their concerns may differ, they share a common concern. They are not asking for handouts. They are asking for resources to do the jobs themselves. I thank them for sharing their concerns with me.

• (1305)

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question concerns foreign aid. The member talked about poverty in the world. I think Canadians are a compassionate group of individuals.

I had the opportunity of representing my constituents in Africa last September. Eight or ten different countries came together to try to discern how to apply the funding Canadians gave to Africa for relief for poverty and HIV-AIDS. We visited some HIV-AIDS hospitals and talked with some of the NGOs.

There is no Canadian alive who would not dig deep into their pocket to support those individuals. The problem is how do we ensure that the money for relief measures, including poverty, gets to where it is needed.

This leads to my question regarding the former government's policy and direction concerning money going to foreign relief. How do we ensure that those dollars get to where they are needed? The former government's policy was that all the money would be applied through the governments. Many of those governments are quite corrupt.

Let us not put it that way. Let us put it another way and talk about our first nations people. Nine billion to twelve billion dollars go to first nations people, yet we have third world conditions. We see a bureaucracy that becomes weighted. Somehow we have to get over that.

Would my colleague tell us how his party would apply those dollars directly to where they are needed, and not necessarily going through governments but through NGOs?

• (1310)

Mr. Roger Valley: Mr. Speaker, I do not have the experience about Africa that my colleague across the way has. I would not let a fear of mismanagement not help the rest of the world.

We can do a lot with raising the amount of money that we pledge to these organizations. I share his concern that at times the money does not reach the right area. There has to be dialogue and discussion and a process that can make it work. I do not have his experience on Africa. I look forward to discussing that with him at another time.

The member mentioned first nations and the issue of the money that is spent and whether there is value for that money. As I travel in my riding, I see that a lot of infrastructure has been put in place without the supports behind it. Is money being wasted by putting in the infrastructure without training dollars being made available? Is there money being spent on infrastructure that is not appropriate for the far north and the living conditions there? In many circumstances I am afraid this is the case.

The Address

We have to the best we can with the resources available. We also have to keep the dialogue going so we can do it right in the future.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was going to ask my hon. colleague a question on shipbuilding, but as he is in a riding that is landlocked, it would be frivolous to ask it. I have a question for him about people going into poverty.

In our country thousands of families are going into poverty because their children have autism. The provinces simply do not have the resources to provide the therapy that is required to assist children with autism.

I know he, as we all have, has received comments through the Internet or whatever from people who have children with autism. Does he believe that autism should be covered under the Canada Health Act and that the federal government should work with the provinces and territories to develop a national strategy so we, once and for all, can assist these families of children with autism?

Mr. Roger Valley: Mr. Speaker, I was gearing myself up for a question on shipbuilding because that was the first question I answered in the last Parliament.

I have not heard the question of autism being a high priority or one of the five priorities for the new government of the day. Support is needed for these families. The member mentioned a national plan and I think that would serve Canada well. It is also true that we should step into the places where there are gaps in our society and in our health care system.

The member has identified one of these gaps. It should be a priority of all parliamentarians in the House to ensure that we look for those gaps and fill them. We must encourage the new government to proceed in that direction.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to express my deepest condolences to the families and friends of the four brave Canadian soldiers who were killed this weekend when their armoured G-Wagon was struck by a roadside bomb. The thoughts and prayers of all Canadians are with their families and their comrades who must carry on the important work they are performing in Afghanistan.

[*Translation*]

I am pleased to show my support today for the Speech from the Throne, which proposes a balanced action plan.

[*English*]

The Speech from the Throne establishes a solid foundation upon which to build a better Canada and it is based on five priorities:

[*Translation*]

Restoring integrity to government; cutting taxes; fighting crime; offering child care choices; and providing the necessary health care services.

[*English*]

The vision of Canada articulated in the Speech from the Throne is one that will give Canadians greater confidence in government accountability and getting things done. As well, the throne speech commits the government to revitalizing the military with a wide

range of capabilities essential in these unpredictable times. A restored military, one that is able to ensure sovereignty across our nation and one that is able to protect Canadians, is a military that Canadians can trust to show up with the necessary skills and equipment in difficulties.

I for one am proud to be part of a government that so strongly supports our armed forces, a government that acknowledges the enormous contribution that the men and women of Canada's military have made to this nation in times past and today. I am proud of a government that takes defence and security issues seriously, a government that is willing to take a leading role in contributing to international security and stability.

For a long time, Canadians have rested secure in our geographic remoteness from global conflict. Our southern border is protected by cooperation with the United States. The east and west approaches to Canada are guarded by the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, and our north is viewed as a vast frozen barrier. However, as we enter the 21st century, Canada's geographical remoteness is under challenge. The melting polar ice cap, the potential for environmental degradation and commercial opportunity in the Arctic are changing how we and others view Canada's north, an area larger than Europe.

Now is the time for Canada to assert its northern sovereignty. To that end, the government's Canada first policy will demonstrate to Canadians with concrete plans and substantial investments in those military capabilities that enhance surveillance, reconnaissance and presence in Canada's Arctic Archipelago.

Likewise, terrorist attacks in continental North America and larger, more frequent natural disasters have alerted us to the necessity of enhancing security and emergency response in Canada. Canada first envisions the establishment of military capabilities in all regions that can quickly respond to domestic needs as well as capabilities that will allow us to focus the forces' wide resources in the event of a national disaster.

Our Canada first policy for defence will strengthen the Canadian Forces' capacity to defend our country and its citizens, assert our sovereignty and assume a leadership role in international operations. It will also allow Canada to better fulfill the responsibility that we share with the United States in protecting the North American continent. It will make Canada more effective in security cooperation. Our policy will also see our military assigned the essential task of helping bring security and stability around the world, just as our men and women in uniform are doing today in Afghanistan.

In order to pursue our policy, it is essential that we transform and modernize our military. We also need to acquire capabilities that will allow Canada to be a leader on the international stage that can make meaningful contributions to global security and humanitarian demands.

In cooperation with allies and like-minded nations, this great country will defend and advance Canada's interests in the world.

The Address

•(1315)

[*Translation*]

In order to properly carry out our policy, we need to expand, modernize and transform the Canadian Forces as quickly as possible so that Canada will be in a position to rise to future challenges.

Furthermore, the government will reform the defence procurement process in order to provide our armed forces with the equipment they need, when they need it, and in a way that is transparent and fair.

The government also intends to strengthen the Canadian Forces within Canada and boost their role on the international stage by giving them new capabilities or improving their existing capabilities.

We would like to see a naval presence on three oceans, a strong land force and revitalized air force, all functioning within an integrated and efficient team of armed forces in Canada, North America, or anywhere in the world.

[*English*]

It is a vision to increase the pride and confidence that Canadians have in their military.

[*Translation*]

Canadians will know that our soldiers will continue to answer the call whenever they are needed, as they have done for decades.

It is a vision that will allow Canada to be a leader in world affairs, as is the case in Afghanistan.

•(1320)

[*English*]

Canada is in Afghanistan because it is in our national interest. Having been there myself together with the Prime Minister, I am more convinced than ever that this mission is right for Canada. Afghanistan was once a safe haven and breeding ground for international terrorism. Now it is a country striving to establish peace, order and good government. It is a country that needs help.

During our recent visit to Afghanistan, the Prime Minister and I saw important signs of progress. Our soldiers are improving the security situation on the ground so that infrastructure can be rebuilt. Political and social institutions are taking root and the economy is picking up, but the task ahead remains significant. It is a complex and dangerous mission where unfortunately Canadians have lost their lives. But let me be clear. Canada will not be intimidated or deterred by terrorists. As the Prime Minister said to our troops in Kandahar, we do not make a commitment and then run away at the first sign of trouble. We are staying the course.

The vision of Canada articulated in the Speech from the Throne is one that will give Canadians greater confidence in what this great country can do for them and in what this great country can do for the world. This Conservative government will put Canada first by strengthening our national sovereignty and security. We will enhance our presence on land and sea and in the air. We will enhance the security of Canada and its citizens both at home and abroad by acquiring the means to act wherever and whenever required. We will become more reliable and effective international security and

humanitarian partners with the means to respond to natural and man-made disasters.

Great endeavours come at a great cost. With the support of Canadians, the will of the government, this great nation's resources, the outstanding service members and the support of their families, we will achieve our vision. Canadians need this and Canada can do it.

The Deputy Speaker: Perhaps the Minister of National Defence could tell the House that he will be splitting his time with the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I am splitting my time with the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians appreciate the fact that we had a debate on the Afghani situation. It is always good to hear some updates.

The minister used the words "staying the course". I wonder if the minister is prepared to stay the course even when situations and facts change, or there is advice given to the government that demonstrates there may be some problems. I would refer specifically to the issue in the newspapers today with regard to the propriety of reducing the GST as opposed to income tax cuts as they relate to productivity and economic growth.

The question is simple. Will the government stay the course even if the government is wrong?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, the government makes its decisions based on the best facts available and based on logical decisions. Right now, from our point of view, in Afghanistan we are making progress. The allies are making progress. We will stay the course in Afghanistan.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the minister two questions.

He mentioned the importance of asserting Canadian sovereignty and the importance of maintaining Canadian sovereignty. Where does the threat to Canadian sovereignty come from, especially in the north?

In the take note debate I also raised concerns about Canadian Forces in Afghanistan turning over prisoners to Afghan authorities under the terms of the agreement that was reached with the Afghan government. We know that the Afghan human rights commission and the U.S. state department both have said that torture is a routine part of detention in Afghanistan. I am personally concerned that when we turn prisoners over to a government that routinely practises torture, we may be setting up our armed forces members for crimes against humanity charges.

Could the minister comment on those two issues?

•(1325)

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, I will deal with the second issue first.

The Address

We have an arrangement with the Afghan government that in the event we capture prisoners, we hand these prisoners over to the Afghan government. We also have within this arrangement the agreement that the Red Cross will inspect the Afghan detention areas and will inspect the treatment of prisoners. The Afghan government has signed on to being committed to meeting all the various rules of war.

We are content at the moment. The Red Cross has not come back to us to report any difficulty with any potential prisoners. We trust the Afghan government and we trust the Red Cross.

As to the first issue about sovereignty, there are territorial disputes right now with about four countries with respect to sovereignty in the north. Also, the ice is thinning in the north and the Northwest Passage is going to open up to more travel by vessels through the Northwest Passage. We have to impose our sovereignty because there are countries in this world that say that the Northwest Passage is international waters. We have to worry about the consequence of vessels going through carrying toxic waste, oil, or whatever. We have to worry about the environmental degradation there.

We have a number of potential challenges in the north. Also, in law, we are only sovereign when we enforce our sovereignty. Up to now we have not been enforcing our sovereignty in the north and we intend to do so.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is an unofficial day of mourning. Four young Canadians offered up the ultimate sacrifice, their very lives, to bring hope to the people of Afghanistan. One of those soldiers was from Toronto. As a sign of respect to the soldiers and their families, the Mayor of Toronto has lowered flags to half-mast. Yet in Ottawa on our Peace Tower our flag remains at full-mast.

Quite correctly, every November 11 we lower flags to half-mast to respect all fallen soldiers through the ages, but what callous intransigence has led to the decision not to respect those who have given their lives so recently?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, it is our policy to lower the flags at the National Defence Headquarters, at the base of origin where the casualty occurred, at the home base, and at units of that environment. If it is a soldier, then all army units will lower their flags. That is our honour to the fallen soldier, sailor or airman, depending on the case.

With respect to the national level flags, it has been the tradition for 80 years to treat every casualty of war or operation, no matter when it happened or where it happened, equally. We will do that by lowering the flags on November 11, Remembrance Day.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for splitting his time. I commend the Minister of National Defence not only for his remarks but for the work that he is doing. I would add to his opening remarks and on behalf of the constituents of Central Nova extend our condolences and best wishes to the families and colleagues of our fallen soldiers.

The throne speech itself sent a clear message to Canadians, a message not only of change but that this government will stand

behind its commitments and will be consistent with what we said and what we are going to do. We will fulfill the commitments in enhancing the opportunities in building communities and families and to also build security, basic premises upon which Canadians agree. This government will ensure that it is not only accountable and responsible for the needs and hopes of Canadians but that it also works closely with them in achieving more.

I am very proud and honoured to be joining today's debate on the Speech from the Throne as the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, and the member representing the constituency of Central Nova.

In the short time that I have been in cabinet, many people, particularly those in my own constituency of Central Nova, have commented to me about the diverse responsibilities that have been given to me by the Prime Minister in these two portfolios. At first blush it may seem that the duties of foreign affairs and ACOA may seem like a strange match. The reality, however, is that the world today is no longer some faraway place that appears on the nightly news. It is very much at our doorstep and in real time, affecting the daily lives of Canadians no matter where they live.

Canadians have always had a strong sense of interest and belonging to the global community. We are a very diverse nation comprised of individuals from around the globe. There is very much a tie-in, I would say a complementary nature, to these two departments.

[*Translation*]

To strengthen Canada's role in the world and to prepare a more promising future for Atlantic Canadians, we must make a solid commitment to Canadians, focus on the future and be determined to get down to business. That is precisely what the government is offering in these two important portfolios.

One of the goals the Prime Minister set for our government is to restore our reputation as a leader and reliable partner within the international community when it comes to defending freedom and democracy in the world.

Promoting Canada's interests in this complex and at times dangerous world requires assurance and the independent capacity to defend our sovereignty and the safety of our citizens.

As Minister of Foreign Affairs, I will see to it that Canada's international policies support these priorities and commitments.

The Address

●(1330)

[English]

Under the leadership of the Prime Minister, I will be working cooperatively with our friends and allies within the international community to advance common values and goals and advance our interests in areas such as human rights, the rule of law, security and democracy, principles and values that we as a country endorse and that elevate people. A very clear example of that is happening in Afghanistan. Many on all sides of the House have commented on the fact that young women are able to attend school and housing projects are underway. Clean water is being provided. Efforts are being made to bring about a stable form of governance.

The goal of this government is to build stronger multilateral and bilateral relationships, starting with Canada's relationship with the United States, our best friend and largest trading partner. Our relationship with the United States is crucial to our economy, our security and our influence in the world. Canadians expect their government to not just manage this relationship but to move it forward in ways that balance our sovereignty with our aspirations. We also need to be on a secure footing. We need to be seen as mature, reasonable and responsible and we need to work cooperatively where we can and to stand up for Canada's interests where we must.

We are also committed to supporting Canada's core values of freedom, democracy and the rule of law and human rights around the world. In order to do this the government must support a more robust diplomatic role for Canada, a stronger military and the effective use of aid dollars. We must work to ensure enhanced cooperation for Canadians and Canada's principles of prosperity in a globalized economy. Important energy and natural resources, highly skilled workforces, creativity and hard work make our country poised for greater gains. Looking for opportunities for Canada abroad, as well as trying to bring investment to this country, is something I will be doing in collaboration with the Minister of International Trade.

I am very proud to say that there are examples within my own constituency of Canadians taking leadership roles in helping to make the world a better place. The Coady International Institute in the riding of Central Nova, founded and named for the esteemed educator Moses Coady, is located on the campus of St. Francis Xavier. For almost 50 years it has worked with community leaders from developing nations around the world. Many come to St. FX to learn about the world famous Antigonish movement and its approaches and methods which can be applied to their own local towns and villages. The Coady institute has a huge impact on international economic development through programs that promote education, innovation, group action and sustained economic activities. I might add that St. FX has deservedly earned the reputation of the number one undergraduate university in the country. It is another example of communities in my riding of Central Nova playing a role in developing leaders for tomorrow.

Another such example is the 14 airfield engineering squadron in Pictou, of which I know the Minister of National Defence is familiar. As one of the squadron's three flight locations in Atlantic Canada, Pictou and surrounding areas have benefited and have been served well over the past decade from a community partnership with the

Department of National Defence. Through community-based programs, the military personnel at 14 engineering squadron often provide assistance with the labour component for non-profit community projects. I commend Ralph Heighton and the organization for the work they do to promote our local community. Working with these local organizations gives military personnel valuable experience in community building that will serve them throughout their military careers, both here in Canada and around the world.

Like my father before me in a previous Conservative government, as Minister Responsible for Atlantic Canada Opportunities I am again afforded an opportunity to provide help and assistance throughout the region in areas of economic development. Atlantic Canada has gone through dramatic changes in the past number of years and so has ACOA. Our region is building on great achievements. Our educated and motivated workforce is attracting national and international investment.

ACOA is committed to responsible and accountable support through communities and through the region. Partnership programs, in particular, are an example of how the government can work cooperatively with all other levels of government in areas like rural infrastructure and working with other education facilities.

The promise of fair oil and gas royalties has finally been realized and our region is looking forward to the opportunities in the international area of commerce.

●(1335)

[Translation]

The realities of international trade provide immediate opportunities for Canada. Growth in China and the Indian sub-continent is causing significant changes in trade patterns and supply chains.

The Atlantic and the Pacific gateways are crucial elements in the national strategy to enhance Canada's competitiveness in the global economy and to gain the maximum benefit from the new trade opportunities.

The Atlantic gateway will allow us to profit from these new avenues, to save money and to promote a stronger economy in the Atlantic region.

[English]

Atlantic Canada provides one of the gateways to the largest markets in the United States with a deep water, year round, ice-free port capable of servicing the new post-Panamax ships on the North American eastern seaboard. This Atlantic gateway will create a value added transportation hub and a network consisting of major ports, rail, airports and the region's major highways. It will capitalize on the potential for increased international trade in the region.

The Address

Through ACOA, the Government of Canada is working with provincial governments and other partners to develop an effective Atlantic gateway strategy to take full advantage and immediately realize the opportunities of global commerce. We can see that the Department of Foreign Affairs and ACOA are not strange partners at all in moving forward in very productive ways. They complement each other and reinforce the goals.

I am confident that, under the leadership of the Prime Minister, the new Conservative government, with its clear focus and accountability to citizens, will ensure that Canada's priorities that were enunciated in the throne speech both at home and abroad will be fulfilled.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member about the North American border initiative which is the U.S. proposed law that would force Canadians to have passports to travel to the United States or, alternatively, force Americans to have passports if they are travelling to Canada. As the member knows, it will have devastating repercussions to Canada's tourism industry, especially in his home province of Nova Scotia and mine of Prince Edward Island.

A number of congressmen want the legislation repealed or delayed, or to try different technologies or methodologies and they want to work with Canadians. The Prime Minister went to the U.S. and basically said that there was absolutely nothing we would do about this issue, which was disappointing to all Canadians.

The member across did take a more responsible approach on his last visit with Secretary of State Rice in saying that he was prepared to work on the issue and would attempt to do what he could for all Canadians. Could he clarify for the House and all Canadians the government's position on this?

• (1340)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, the member for Charlottetown is right when he states that this is an issue that will have repercussions throughout the country, particularly in border communities. As he outlined in his question, this will affect the American people as well and their ability and capacity to travel. In fact, I dare say that given the number of Americans who currently hold passports, this has become a real issue for them. It has also been outlined in Congress.

He also mentioned the fact, and rightly so, that it is in legislation and therein lies the problem. However, having said that, my colleague, the public security minister, has been speaking with the Secretary of Homeland Security, Michael Chertoff. I had conversations as recently as 10 days ago with Secretary of State Rice. I believe the timelines that have been set up and the technology that currently exist signal that this discussion will continue for some time. In the meantime, we certainly encourage as many Canadians as possible to apply for and receive their passports.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the minister a question while he is in the House. The Conservative Party and the Prime Minister promised Quebec a voice at UNESCO. Just last week, the Prime Minister repeated this promise before the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal. We

now know that only sovereign states can be represented at UNESCO. Unfortunately, Quebec is not yet a sovereign state.

I would like to know how the minister intends to resolve this matter, especially since in recent days the Bloc Québécois has made suggestions based on the Belgian model, among others. In addition, when will we have a clear answer with regard to the promise reiterated last week by the Prime Minister?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I am certain that this government will find a means of working with the Government of Quebec. Minister Gagnon-Tremblay and I are following up on this matter and our discussions centre on the details of the role of Quebec at UNESCO. We hope to reach an agreement quickly. I repeat, Mrs. Gagnon-Tremblay—Minister of International Relations—and I are working together to reach an agreement. I hope it will be soon.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs will know that his government's Speech from the Throne outlined tax cuts but outlined very little on tax fairness. I would like to point out to him that through tax motivated expatriation, which is the polite word for sleazy, tax cheating loopholes, the federal government treasury loses approximately \$10 billion per year. I am speaking specifically of offshore tax havens.

As the Minister of Foreign Affairs, I would like his view or, even better, his commitment that his government will take seriously plugging these tax loopholes of offshore tax havens where people, like former prominent ministers of finance, have all their shelter companies so they do not pay taxes in this country.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I know that is a long held view of the hon. member, and his colourful language and description of previous finance ministers does ring true in this place. Efforts were made to preserve tax shelters by individuals who were in a perfect position to do so but were in perhaps the most blatant conflict of interest ever seen on the floor of the House of Commons.

It is always the role of government to protect its citizens and its economy. I am sure he has suggestions as to how we might plug some of these loopholes and that he would want to work directly with the Minister of Finance and the Minister of National Revenue with those suggestions. I hope he will continue to make those useful suggestions at the committees on which he is a member.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to share my time with the hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

This being the first debate in which I have spoken in this House, I would like, first, to thank the people of Gatineau for their support. I will be worthy of their confidence because they voted to have a member who is accessible and who will listen to their concerns and take action to help them in order to improve their quality of life.

I would also like to take advantage of this opportunity to say that I will be a true defender of Quebec's interests. Until our national independence is achieved, I will attend valiantly to this task along with my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois.

The Address

Insofar as the Speech from the Throne is concerned, I want to point out some oversights regarding matters of great concern to many of our citizens so that the newly elected government is well apprised of them and able to act accordingly.

One problem is of particular concern to me, namely that the government should do what it can to combat the unfairness that exists between the two shores of the Ottawa river, between the Outaouais region and Ottawa. In the past, the Liberal governments took my region, the Outaouais, and my riding, Gatineau, for granted. As a result, they neglected the Quebec side of the Ottawa river. They considered the Quebec side just an extension of the city of Ottawa. This mindset must end. The Outaouais and the riding of Gatineau are part of Quebec and share its aspirations and distinct vision. The Outaouais should get its fair share in all respects. I am talking here about including the Outaouais, which is just as important a region as Ottawa.

Twenty-two years after the federal cabinet set itself the goal of raising the proportion of federal public servants who worked on the Quebec side of the Ottawa river from 22.6% to 25%, the proportion has actually fallen. If Crown corporations and agencies are included, only 20% of public servants work in the Outaouais, in comparison with 80% in Ottawa. This shortfall added up to more than 5,500 public servants in 2004, or a loss in annual income for the Quebec side of the river of nearly \$300 million. Now that this situation has again been pointed out, it should be remedied.

Still with regard to the inequities between the two banks of the Ottawa River, in the federal capital area, the Government of Canada spends over a billion dollars on research and development. Of this amount, 93.6% goes to Ottawa, while a slim 6.4% comes to the Outaouais region. This is explained in large part by the number of federal research centres in each area. Out of a total of 31 federal research centres, 30 are in Ottawa and only one is located on the Quebec side of the Ottawa River: 30 to 1. It is more than time the federal government made sure that one-quarter of the research centres were located on the Outaouais side, and three-quarters on the Ontario side.

There is one file that has been open for over 20 years and that could be closed with the good will of the current government. This is the construction of an anti-noise barrier in the Promenades area of my riding. The previous Liberal government reneged on its promise to participate, with the Government of Quebec and the City of Gatineau, in its construction last November. I sincerely hope that the current Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities will formally join the project so that it can be completed once and for all. After waiting for 20 years, the citizens concerned are entitled to expect the federal government to keep its word.

With regard to the distribution of museums between Gatineau and Ottawa, the Outaouais is now entitled to get the next museum. The Science and Technology Museum has been waiting 40 years for a permanent location.

•(1345)

Since the inauguration of the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Gatineau, the City of Ottawa has obtained the National Gallery of Canada and the Canadian War Museum. Now it is the turn of Gatineau to get the new museum within its borders.

I also hope that the federal government will take a significant part in the Rapibus public transit project in Gatineau. I hope that it will do likewise for the building of a four-lane Highway 50, when the Government of Quebec asks it to do so.

As for realities that go beyond Outaouais-Ottawa relations, we should think about employment insurance. The EI fund became a real cash cow for the previous government, even though it had not paid a penny into it since 1992. That has to stop now.

A study conducted by the Canadian Labour Congress shows us that the restrictions on the employment insurance program accounted for an annual loss, between 1993 and 2003, of \$3 billion in Quebec. For my riding, Gatineau, this means a loss of \$52.1 million for each of those ten years.

What will the Conservative government do about that? The Coalition des sans-chemise and all the people who contribute to the employment insurance plan are waiting to see whether the openness of the Conservatives will close up tightly when the time comes to discuss this issue.

Seniors in Gatineau have been forgotten. As if the precarious economic situation of seniors were not difficult enough, the previous Liberal government was determined to refuse to make full retroactive payment to seniors identified as being entitled to the Guaranteed Income Supplement. As a result of the efforts of the Bloc Québécois, the party was able to identify some 42,000 seniors who were entitled to this, out of the 68,000 Quebecers eligible for the Guaranteed Income Supplement. From 1993 to 2001, no less than \$800 million, for all of Quebec, should have been paid out by the previous government to the most vulnerable seniors. In the riding of Gatineau, 800 to 900 people were cheated, with the losses averaging nearly \$4 million. The government must locate those people and pay them what they are entitled to.

The Speech from the Throne did not mention social housing. From 1993 to 2001, the federal government completely withdrew from funding new social housing units. That withdrawal is one of the causes of the current shortage of rental housing and the growing problem of homelessness. This is a serious crisis.

Because nearly 6,050 renters in the city of Gatineau spend at least 50% of their meagre incomes on housing, and nearly 12,470 households pay at least 30% of their income to rent the roof over their heads, the federal government has to loosen its purse strings for social housing.

There is also SCPI, the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative. That program has generated investments of over \$4.5 million in the riding of Gatineau since it was created in 2001. In addition to meeting the essential needs of socially excluded individuals and families, it has promoted the hiring of dozens of experienced workers.

I sincerely hope that the new government will renew and expand the SCPI program so that organizations involved in the fight against homelessness are able to continue their good work.

The Bloc Québécois will stand up against inequality between the two sides of the Ottawa River. It will also continue to stand up for the rights of Quebecers in this House.

The Conservative government has promised a lot for Quebec. The Outaouais is a region of Quebec in its own right. The ball is in the Conservative government's court. I am always ready to work with the government for the proper development of the riding of Gatineau to the level to which it is entitled.

• (1350)

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate my colleague on his excellent speech and also on his election. It warmed our hearts when he was elected, both in the Bloc Québécois and in Quebec as a whole. This now demonstrates that the idea of Quebec sovereignty is indeed felt throughout all regions of Quebec.

My colleague has addressed the question of employment insurance. I would like to ask him why, in his opinion, the Bloc Québécois has placed such emphasis on the importance of a program to assist older workers. As we know, the subamendment to the Speech from the Throne proposed by the Bloc Québécois refers to this. The subamendment was unanimously passed by this House. I would like the member to remind us of the importance of this program to the Bloc Québécois and to the region of Gatineau.

• (1355)

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Speaker, the program for older worker adjustment is a cornerstone in the life of a person of a certain age who has just lost his or her job. Finding new employment in such circumstances demands a lot of effort and courage.

The program for older worker adjustment responds to situations such as those we are seeing in my riding and the adjacent one, on the other side of the Ottawa River, where the Domtar mill has just closed its doors. The people who worked there for 20 or 25 years are entitled to respect. They are entitled to expect to be provided with the resources they need to find another place in life.

After a worker has held a job for 20 or 30 years, he is told that he is finished and given no help at all. So he has to turn to employment insurance and even social assistance. At a certain time of his life, he must even go so far as to part with property he has accumulated, whether it be a house or other property. Often these are things he has worked all his life to acquire.

The federal government must reactivate the program for older worker adjustment so that these workers can recover their human dignity. They have worked for the enrichment of Canada and Quebec and of plants and industries. We have no right to toss them aside.

That is why it is very important to bring this program back and to respect workers of all ages, especially those in difficult situations.

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to hear my colleague speak about seniors. Does he intend to continue the work begun by the outgoing hon. member for Champlain, Mr. Marcel Gagnon? We must take the time to underscore the work that he has done here. I am sure he is listening to me right now.

So I ask my colleague whether he intends to continue the tireless work that Marcel has had the opportunity to do in recent years for seniors.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Speaker, the guaranteed income supplement is no mere device, and it is not just temporary assistance.

Statements by Members

The federal government, the Government of Canada, in the last Parliament, had the opportunity to see to it that all seniors entitled to the guaranteed income supplement might receive it with full retroactivity. This money they are rightfully owed could sometimes total \$6,000 per year. This would have alleviated the hard times and improved the quality of life of seniors. Unfortunately, the government did not have the courage to do this, in the last Parliament.

We in the Bloc Québécois have met with seniors. We have done field surveys to find out how we might help them. We have checked, and some persons were entitled to this supplement.

During my election campaign, in fact, I mentioned that I would lend a helping hand to seniors—

The Deputy Speaker: Excuse me for interrupting the hon. member, but we must now move to Statements by Members. The hon. member for Calgary West has the floor.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to humbly thank the voters of Calgary West for allowing me to represent them in this 39th Parliament. This was made possible through the efforts of the many dedicated volunteers and supporters who worked tirelessly knowing that change was in the air. Change is now here.

The Conservative government will crack down on crime, putting the rights of victims and their families before the criminals who have harmed them, and restore safe and secure communities across the country. This includes raising the age of consent for sexual relations between children and adults from 14 to 16 years. Police will now be able to crack down on those who prey upon our children. Canadian families need protection from such predators.

Once again, I would like to thank Calgary West for electing me and allowing me to be part of this new Conservative government.

* * *

• (1400)

ANTHONY LOCILENTO

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that I rise to pay tribute to Mr. Anthony Locilento.

On March 5, 2006, Anthony Locilento, son of Angelo and Grace Locilento, was killed in a tragic snowmobiling accident in York Region.

Statements by Members

Anthony was a wonderful son to Angelo and Grace, a great brother, and a caring father of a beautiful little girl, Angelina Grace Lociento. He was very close to his family. He worked alongside his parents every day at their family business. Anthony will be greatly missed by all of us who knew him.

On behalf of all members of the House of Commons, I want to express my deepest condolences to the Lociento family as we honour the exceptional life of a young man named Anthony Lociento.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PAUL OUELLET

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, an artist from my region, Paul Ouellet, recently took first prize in the CBC/Radio-Canada literary awards in the French creative non-fiction category.

This award established by CBC/Radio-Canada is one of the most important prizes for unpublished works gives writers of all ages an opportunity to promote their work.

The narrative, *Moi enfant*, by Paul Ouellet was considered on the basis of its high quality writing, originality of style and sensitivity of the story. We are captivated and enchanted by the language Paul Ouellet has used in relating his childhood.

Mr. Ouellet is from La Motte, in Abitibi-Témiscamingue. He is a well known painter in the region and has distinguished himself once again, this time by his writing.

I offer this talented artist my warmest congratulations on his work and more especially on so deservedly winning this prize.

* * *

[*English*]

RIDING OF NEW WESTMINSTER—COQUITLAM

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my community of New Westminster, Coquitlam and Port Moody has a proud history going back to 1858 and the gold rush. New Westminster was B.C.'s first capital city named by Queen Victoria, and the oldest Canadian city west of the lakehead.

Coquitlam, which means "little red fish", opened up in the mid-1800s with the construction of North Road to provide access from New Westminster to the port of Port Moody.

In 1909, the young community got a boost when over 100 francophone Canadians arrived to work at Fraser Mills and Maillardville was founded. It became the largest French speaking community west of Manitoba.

Port Moody's history has been dominated by two events, the gold rush on the Fraser and the 1886 arrival of the first transcontinental train.

The community of New Westminster, Coquitlam and Port Moody is today an exciting diverse mix of new Canadians and multi-generational citizens. I am very honoured to again represent this historic and growing area of British Columbia.

VOLUNTEERISM

Mr. John Williams (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in my first words in this House since the election, I would like to thank my constituents of Edmonton—St. Albert for the trust and confidence which they have placed in me, by electing me as their member of Parliament on January 23.

Our country is a great country. It is great because of the people who serve this country. I think of our military personnel, many of whom reside in my constituency, which is adjacent to the Edmonton Garrison. They are defending our freedom in dangerous places, and we are proud of their dedication, commitment and sacrifice.

Our great country is also being built by volunteers. I express gratitude to them during this National Volunteer Week. Millions of unsung heroes give of themselves to help others in need, here at home and around the world. Our volunteers are an inspiration to us all.

We are proud of our military, proud of our volunteers, and proud of this great country. Under this new Conservative government, we can only go from strength to strength.

* * *

• (1405)

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week I travelled to several remote first nations in my riding and met with their chiefs and councils. It was a relatively short trip of only 2,000 km from the centre of my riding. In every community, I was approached by elders and survivors who expressed concern that the government will not commit to the compensation set out in the agreement on the residential schools survivors.

They have waited too long for the Government of Canada to acknowledge its responsibility for this tragedy and now they are waiting while the Conservative government figures out an excuse for why it is stalling.

Survivors want a clear commitment on this agreement and a timeline for when they can expect their compensation. They want action and they want it now.

* * *

VICTIMS OF CRIME

Mr. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Mr. Speaker, from April 23 to April 29 Canada marks the first National Victims of Crime Awareness Week. When a crime occurs, it rarely affects just one person. Friends, families and entire communities feel the impact.

In 2004, fully 28% of Canadians identified themselves as victims of crime. Under the previous government, the rights of criminals were too often placed ahead of compassion for the victims of crime. This government will ensure that the voices of victims are heard loudly and clearly in the justice system.

During this week, I encourage members of Parliament to raise awareness of victims' issues in their ridings and promote the services available to Canadians who have suffered because of crime.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank those who work with victims for their determination and compassion. I ask all members of Parliament to join me in recognizing the first National Victims of Crime Awareness Week, acknowledging both victims and those who serve them.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL BOOK AND COPYRIGHT DAY

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, culture is what enables us as human beings to build a framework for ourselves, to construct who we are. It helps us to think on our own and to understand the world in order to make a positive contribution to changing it.

On the day after International Book and Copyright Day, the Bloc Québécois invites one and all to discover the architects of our cultural heritage, the talented authors the diversity of Quebec has engendered.

On the eve of the presentation of its first budget, we ask the Conservative government to raise the budget of the Canada Council to \$300 million, to abolish the GST on books, to exempt creators from taxation on the public lending right and copyright, as is already the case in Quebec.

The collective health of our culture, of the solidity and viability of the structure of our identity and of the future of our creative persons depend on it.

* * *

[English]

ARMENIA

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on this day we commemorate a dark chapter in history. The genocide of 1915 took the lives of an estimated 1.5 million Armenians.

Canada's legislature, from a Senate resolution passed on June 13, 2002 to the adoption of a motion in this House on April 21, 2004, has finalized a complete acknowledgement recognizing the Armenian genocide.

Canada greatly values the contributions that Armenians make to our national life. On this solemn day of remembrance, together, our nations look with hope and determination toward a future of peace and prosperity for all and freedom from ignorance.

I commend the Prime Minister for his courage and leadership in doing the right thing yet again and I join the Armenian communities in and around Cambridge, across this great nation and all corners of the globe, in the observance of this, the 91st anniversary of the Armenian genocide.

* * *

CANADIAN FORCES

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with profound sadness that I rise today to pay tribute to the four brave Canadian soldiers who lost their lives in the name of freedom in Afghanistan.

Statements by Members

One of those young men was Corporal Matthew Dinning, who was born in Richmond Hill. He served with distinction in the 2nd Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group Headquarters at CFB Petawawa.

Matthew was a bright, energetic young man who had wanted to become a police officer like his father. He knew the risks of his mission, but was prepared to serve his country in this difficult conflict.

His grandparents, Jim and Rhelda Stockall, are friends of mine and I want them to know, as well as his mother Laurie, his father Lincoln and his brother, that this nation is with them during their difficult time.

Matthew's sacrifice has not been in vain and the lives of his comrades, Bombardier Myles Mansell, Lieutenant William Turner and Corporal Randy Payne have not been sacrificed in vain.

We salute these brave soldiers, along with their families. They are in our hearts and our prayers. We will remember them.

* * *

● (1410)

PRE-BUDGET WEB CONSULTATIONS

Ms. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have just participated in the first ever pre-budget web consultations. This is an excellent innovation led by Canada's new Minister of Finance.

Our government would like to thank the more than 5,600 individuals and organizations who contributed their advice and input as we make difficult budget choices. We heard from Canadians about their priorities for our country's social, economic and physical environment. We received suggestions about how to spend the dollars Canadians send to Ottawa more efficiently and effectively. Many participants affirmed the strong desire for lower taxes.

The Minister of Finance will be factoring these web consultation proposals into his budget decisions. Our government will continue to work with Canadians as we follow through on our promises.

* * *

IRAQ

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians remain strongly opposed to the war in Iraq. Thousands are demonstrating their opposition to this illegal war by supporting American war resisters seeking refuge here. These brave young people have left U.S. military service for reasons of conscience.

Many know the war directly after serving in Iraq. They are disturbed by what they witnessed there and believe they were misled by President Bush. None take their actions to resist the war lightly.

Last Friday I was honoured to meet two of them, Kyle Snyder and Abner Williamson, and their supporters. Canada needs people of conscience like Kyle and Abner. Canada has been well served by those who fled persecution for their beliefs. We have benefited greatly from the contributions of earlier American war resisters who came during the Vietnam war. They received our welcome as must those who today resist the war in Iraq.

Statements by Members

I call on the government to immediately cease all removal actions against the war resisters and implement a special in Canada program that will allow them permanent resident status.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ARMENIA

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on April 7, the House addressed the subject of the Rwandan genocide of 1994.

[*English*]

Today, we commemorate the 91st anniversary of the Armenian genocide which the House condemned as a crime against humanity in April 2004. On April 25, tomorrow, we will remember the 6 million Jews deliberately murdered by Nazis during the second world war.

[*Translation*]

Without hesitation, we have labeled these massacres as genocides because, for racial, ethnic, religious or political reasons, certain countries have sought to annihilate these populations in violation of their right to life.

Canadians have lost family members in these genocides.

[*English*]

It is our responsibility to commemorate the memory of these victims as we reflect on the senselessness of these sadistic atrocities. Canada must serve as an example to the world that all peoples, regardless of their colour, ethnicity or religion can live with dignity and respect.

Finally, I would like to welcome to Ottawa Canadians of Armenian origin from my riding of Laval—Les Îles.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ARMENIA

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker,

[*Member spoke in Armenian as follows:*]

Parts rashnon serpazan hayr sirelli hay kebektiner.

[*Translation*]

Today, April 24, we commemorate the 1915 Armenian genocide that claimed 1.5 million victims. The first genocide of the 20th century wiped out more than half of the Armenian population.

Two years ago, the House passed the Bloc Québécois' Motion No. 380 recognizing the genocide.

The Conservative government must do its utmost to ensure that recognizing these barbaric acts means more than just passing a motion. We should adopt an act of formal acknowledgement out of respect for families who lost relatives under horrible conditions and to show that we will never again accept genocide.

There are 18,860 Quebeckers of Armenian origin, 5,880 of whom live in Laval. I am speaking on their behalf today to express the hope that nobody will ever have to experience such a tragedy again.

[*Member spoke in Armenian as follows:*]

Guetse high jogovourthe.

* * *

[*English*]

CANADIAN FORCES

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on April 7, 2006, Mr. Lincoln Dinning wrote to the Prime Minister asking that the Prime Minister lower the flags on Parliament Hill when a Canadian soldier is killed in the line of duty.

Mr. Dinning has asked his member of Parliament, the member for Huron—Bruce to action on his behalf. Since that time Mr. Dinning's son has been killed in the line of duty in Afghanistan.

I, on behalf of all members of the House, offer my sincere condolences to the Dinning family and the families of all Canadians who have given their lives for this country.

In the coming days the official opposition will be bringing forward a motion in the House that will fulfill the wishes of Mr. Dinning.

* * *

●(1415)

GOODS AND SERVICES TAX

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party of Canada stands up for Canadians paying high prices at the gas pumps. Unlike the Liberals who did nothing to address high gas prices, we will cut the GST.

Last year the former Liberal transport minister told the *Montreal Gazette* that the government cannot give rebates to Canadian drivers. The Conservative government is reducing the GST for Canadian drivers.

The former finance minister told the *Toronto Star* that he does not see any way for Ottawa to ease gasoline prices for consumers. The Conservatives are reducing the GST for consumers.

The former environment minister told the *Calgary Herald* that high gas prices are actually good for Canada in the medium and long term. They are not good for Canadian farmers with the highest input costs ever. They are not good for Canadian drivers. They are not good for Canadian families.

This Conservative government will reduce the GST to 6% immediately and to 5% in the long term for all Canadians.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS**

[Translation]

[English]

CANADA-U.S. BORDER

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week the Minister of Public Safety assured the nation that American passport law will not apply to Canadians. He said that Americans and Canadians will keep their traditional free access across our open border, but American officials immediately contradicted his position.

Today we have the sorry spectacle of the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Public Safety all contradicting themselves on this issue of national importance. Canadians cannot tolerate this form of ad hoc confusion.

When can Canadians expect a clear answer from the government on this important issue?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have always been clear. The law in question is a law of Congress. It is not a law of this government nor of this Parliament. Unlike the previous government, we have taken action right away to ensure that we are ready to respond if and when this law does come into effect.

The Minister of Public Safety met with his counterpart in the United States. They looked at a number of options. We continue to examine options. We continue to try to encourage the American government to understand the risk this law may pose both to trade and to tourism, but in the meantime, we will be ready should the law come into effect.

* * *

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is one more in the continuing pattern of flip-flops that we see from the government. There have been flip-flops on cutting taxes, on access to information, on appointing unelected senators, on floor crossing, and the list goes on and on.

Now the Prime Minister has appointed his Conservative fundraiser as chair of the public appointments commission.

We heard the Prime Minister in his recent speeches talk about appointing only the most qualified people. Is it not a stretch for the Prime Minister to say that the only qualified person for that job was his close friend and fundraiser?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Gwyn Morgan is one of the most highly respected CEOs in the country. In fact, he was voted not only CEO of the year but most respected CEO in the country.

What he has volunteered to do for \$1 a year is to clean up the appointments process in this country. Canadians thank him. I understand why the Liberal Party does not want the process cleaned up.

GASOLINE PRICES

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is always the same old story and always the same answers. The former government is criticized rather than looking toward the future. Answers are needed for the future.

Last week, the Prime Minister was reminded of his commitment regarding gas prices. Contrary to his firm position in the past, now that he is in power, he is telling us to get used to the price.

The Prime Minister is proving to be a turncoat. He is changing his colours once again. Will he finally do what is right? Will he keep his word and reduce fuel taxes for Canadians?

● (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, facts are facts. During the election campaign, the Conservative Party proposed a 1% reduction in the GST, not only for fuel, but for all goods and services. For consumers, this means a reduction of \$5 billion. I hope that the Liberal Party will support this reduction.

[English]

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister should recognize today's question concerning gasoline. He asked it last September. The then opposition leader told the House that Canadian businesses and consumers were enduring record high gas prices and government inaction. Today consumers face unprecedented gas prices and the right hon. member's flip-flop is now clearly on the other foot.

Does the Prime Minister actually believe that Canadians should just get used to it, or will he in fact stand by his previous statement and follow his own advice and cut taxes on gasoline now?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government will honour the commitment it made to Canadians in the election campaign to cut taxes not just on gasoline but on every single consumer product and service by cutting the GST 1%. It is a \$5 billion cut. I hope this now means that the hon. member and his party intend to support that reduction.

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is not a member in the House who knows this issue better than many on this side. I can tell the hon. member that what he is proposing is less than 1%, it is only one cent on tax.

The Prime Minister promised to eliminate the GST portion on gas if prices went above 85¢ per litre to prevent the government from reaping windfall profits on top of high gas prices. He did not just say that; the Canadian Taxpayers Federation knew about that as well.

Does the Prime Minister still support this pledge, or should Canadians get used to just another pair in his growing wardrobe of flip-flops?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, we made commitments to the Canadian public in the election. That commitment we will honour.

I notice the hon. member started out wanting to cut taxes on consumer goods, then he was silent when I challenged him to support the cut in the GST. If members of the Liberal Party are serious, they will support the GST cut. If not, they do not have anything to talk about.

* * *

[*Translation*]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on April 5, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food said in this House that an aid package would be announced by his government within a matter of days. That was 20 days ago and farmers are still waiting and a number of them do not even have enough money for seed. The government has a great deal of authority, but it cannot change the seasons. The farmers need help now.

Why will the Prime Minister not intervene right away and give farmers the urgent help they are calling for?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Bloc knows that this government is quite concerned about the situation in agriculture. That is why the first thing this government did was to allocate \$750 million to help farmers. We also made promises during the election campaign. A budget will be brought down very shortly. I ask that the leader of the Bloc Québécois wait until then.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is right to be concerned because as things stand, one farm a week disappears in Quebec.

The Prime Minister said we need to wait for the budget. Can he tell us, here in this House, that farmers will see in the next budget measures that will help them directly and immediately?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign we promised an additional \$500 million for agriculture. We intend to keep that promise. I am asking the leader of the Bloc Québécois to wait for the budget. I hope we can count on the support of the Bloc Québécois for this budget and for our farmers.

• (1425)

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in addition to this farming income crisis is the significant increase in milk protein imports, which are significantly reducing the number of outlets for milk from our farmers and requiring them to reduce their production quotas themselves.

Why does the government not use its authority to put an immediate stop to this increase in imported milk by-products in Quebec and Canada?

[*English*]

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board (Canadian Wheat Board), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has been dealing with this issue. The agriculture

minister has offered to sit down with both the producers and the processors to come to a resolution of the issue. He looks forward to working with the industry to do that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we had the same problem with cheese sticks. The Bloc Québécois had to fight for two years with the previous government before it took any action. Under article XXVIII of the GATT or by way of regulation, the government has the power to put an immediate stop to any increased imports of dairy by-products.

Can the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food not announce immediately that his government is going to put a stop to this import of dairy proteins, which is urgently needed by dairy producers?

[*English*]

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board (Canadian Wheat Board), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister has offered to do something. He has offered to sit down with the processors and the producers in order to come to a resolution of this problem. He intends to do that.

* * *

CHILD CARE

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this weekend I met with the Conservative premier of P.E.I., Mr. Binns. He and other premiers recognize that the federal government needs to provide financial assistance to families in raising their kids and needs to provide real child care spaces so that parents can find a place for their kids' care.

The government's plan will do neither. The family allowance is going to be largely clawed back in taxes and there are going to be no real child care spaces created at all.

Will the Prime Minister commit today to provide both the financial aid, all of it that was promised, and the child care spaces that people need?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the NDP knows full well that in the most recent election campaign we made very specific commitments to provide financial aid to families. We intend to do that over the course of the next year. We intend to replace the existing child care programs with programs that will create real spaces. I would point out that the premier of P.E.I. is on record as noting that we will provide nearly twice as much money as the previous government did in pursuit of these objectives.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would only suggest that the staff of the Prime Minister provide him with the latest coverage of Mr. Binns' comments pursuant to the meeting we had just a couple of days ago. They are rather different.

In the election, the Prime Minister stated that "Canadians...have not given any one party a majority...They have asked us to cooperate, to work together...build consensus". Last week, the Prime Minister was going around the country acting like a schoolyard bully. He was threatening the opposition parties.

Oral Questions

If we are going to make Parliament work we need dialogue, not dares, so I ask the Prime Minister, is he prepared to sit down and have a meeting to discuss how we make sure child care spaces are truly created in this country?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the NDP will know that I have sat down with him and heard some of his ideas on how we can best proceed in this matter. We are listening. At the same time, we do have commitments to fulfill and the reality is that the child care allowance is a budget measure. Therefore, it is a confidence measure. We hope that all parties will see the wisdom of supporting money that goes directly to parents.

* * *

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are starting to see past the Prime Minister's selective accountability act with yet another flip-flop.

On Friday, the Prime Minister announced the appointment of Conservative bagman Gwyn Morgan to oversee, of all things, patronage appointments. Yes, the new guardian of patronage appointments by the Conservative government is in fact a loyal, long-time fundraiser for the party.

Will the Prime Minister actually demonstrate some accountability, reverse this appointment and name someone impartial to the position?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, Mr. Morgan is one of the most respected business people in this country, who has agreed, basically on a volunteer basis, to clean up the patronage mess left by the previous government. It is no surprise that any CEO in this country or, frankly, any citizen in this country who wants government to be cleaned up is not a member of the Liberal Party.

• (1430)

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are not talking about the qualifications of an oil executive. We are talking about somebody who can be impartial as a guardian of public trust.

We have seen Senator LeBreton crowned the queen of Conservative patronage. Now it seems Gwyn Morgan wants to be the crown prince. His best qualification for the job is a \$100,000 donation in December 2003 when the Conservative-Alliance swallowed the Progressive Conservatives, and he keeps on giving. This is not the person Canadians want overseeing Conservative patronage.

When will the Prime Minister start to do as he says, overturn this appointment and end another example of hypocrisy?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will give the hon. member the benefit of the doubt that he does not understand the nature of the position. Mr. Morgan will not make appointments. Mr. Morgan's job is to ensure that there are search processes in place, that the positions are widely advertised, that those who fill them have appropriate qualifications and that the positions are necessary in the first place.

I can understand why the Liberal Party does not want these kinds of reforms enacted, but Canadians do.

* * *

[Translation]

THE CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as time goes on, it seems clear that this government's motto is "Do as we say, not as we do". The Prime Minister talks about accountability, yet the Minister of Public Works and Government Services is conspicuously absent from this House. The Prime Minister says he is averse to lobbyists, but his Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities took on a new role as a lobbyist for a telecommunications firm just days after resigning as minister of communications of Quebec.

When will the government put an end to its repeated flip-flops?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that the cabinet ministers obey all the rules, both past and present. This sets us apart from the previous government.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, talk about a flip-flop. The members of the government can play holier than thou as much as they want, but Canadians will not be fooled. If, as it claims, the government is not making patronage appointments, then how does it explain the appointment of former Conservative member Jim Gouk to the board of NAV CANADA? Was the Prime Minister trying to help Mr. Gouk win the bet he made that he could take a weapon on board a commercial flight at any airport in the country?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the former member of this House demonstrated with his knowledge and experience that he was highly qualified for the position. He expressed an interest, and NAV CANADA decided to choose him.

* * *

MINISTERIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, under the accountability legislation, a reporting public office holder will be formally prohibited from holding another position. We have learned that the Minister of Transportation's own Director of Communications signed two press releases: the first dated April 10, for the Department of Transportation, and the second, on April 11, while acting for Apple.

Can the Minister of Transportation explain why his own Director of Communications, a former Conservative candidate in Saint-Hyacinthe, is acting with such blatant disregard for the legislation?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the person in question is the Director of Communications for my office. She does the work for which she is paid and she does an excellent job.

Oral Questions

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on April 10 she signed a press release for the Department of Transportation and the next day she signed one for Apple.

Since his government made the conflict of interest issue its priority throughout the election campaign, how can the Minister of Transportation have been so imprudent as to allow his Director of Communications to act with such blatant disregard for the legislation two and one half months after the elections? We are far from achieving real change. This is looking like the former government.

• (1435)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, basically I will repeat what I said moments ago. Of course, all provisions governing ethical behaviour of members on this side of the House and the applicable regulations will apply in her case. I will determine whether or not the allegations brought forward by the member are reasonable and founded.

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GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the latest flare-up in the price of gasoline at the pump is the result of higher prices for crude oil and a huge increase at the same time in refinery profits that are holding the rest of the economy hostage.

Of the increased costs of gasoline we have been facing since March 13, over 7¢ a litre is due to the international price of crude oil, while 9¢ a litre represents the additional and unjustified profits of the oil companies at the refinery. How can this government allow that? Will the Minister of Industry do something?

[English]

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member will know that the Competition Bureau has investigated this matter at least five separate times. Each and every single time it has found that there were no improprieties. Nothing was done wrong.

The government is going to provide relief. It is going to deliver on its campaign commitment and reduce the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in a few days, we will find out the size of the increase in oil company profits.

Why would this government not abolish the \$250 million tax gift made by the previous government to the oil companies two years ago and why would it not establish a \$500 million surtax on oil company profits? That would make our fellow citizens, the victims of the oil companies, feel better.

[English]

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member will know that the price of crude oil is driven by global market forces largely beyond our control. There is a number of factors.

We are doing everything we can as a government to bring stability in this area. We will begin by reducing our own taxes in Canada by cutting the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%, providing the broadest tax relief for Canadians that will benefit every single Canadian in this country.

* * *

FEDERAL ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what a difference a week makes. In unveiling his so-called accountability act, the Prime Minister proposed to ban all corporate donations to political parties, yet this Saturday the Prime Minister will speak at a \$5,000 per table corporate fundraising event for the New Brunswick Conservative Party. Is this how the Prime Minister plans to reduce corporate influence on government or is this just another Conservative flip-flop?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member knows that the fundraiser in question is not for the Conservative Party of Canada. It is a fundraiser for the provincial Progressive Conservative Party and of course is conducted under the laws of the province of New Brunswick.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians see that the Prime Minister will go a considerable distance in contradicting himself to help his political friends.

[Translation]

The contradictions continue. In the so called bill on accountability, the Prime Minister claims to want to eliminate corporate donations to political parties.

However, on Saturday, the Prime Minister will be in Moncton for a fundraising event for the New Brunswick Progressive Conservative Party. The cost is \$5,000 a table.

Is this not another Conservative Party flip flop?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister has said, not a single dollar from this event would go to support this political party.

What I do want to do is challenge the member opposite. Will he support the federal accountability act? Will he support this government's sweeping changes to clean up the corrupt mess left by the previous government?

* * *

• (1440)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on April 11, the Chief of Defence Staff said that tactical airlift replacement was urgently needed. From 2001 to 2004, the Minister of Defence was a lobbyist for Airbus, a company competing for DND airlift contracts.

So it can be confirmed that he is currently not in a conflict of interest, could the minister advise the House of whether or not he met with General Hillier or any other member of the military leadership on behalf of Airbus while he was working as a lobbyist?

Oral Questions

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the quick answer is no. However, beyond your question, your implication was that somehow we—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, I apologize.

The answer to the hon. member's question is no, but I go further to say that we will consider all the requirements of the military equipment, personnel, training et cetera, based on the advice of the military. If there are equipment requirements, they will be processed according to the system within public works and defence.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the implication is that the hon. minister did not meet with General Hillier. I will take it on the face of what he said.

The appointment of a former lobbyist as defence minister is a flip-flop on the part of the Prime Minister and raises the question of conflict of interest. The committees of the House will be formed in the next few days. Would the minister commit himself to be the first witness before the committee to explain to the members why he still thinks that his former lobbying affiliations do not present any conflict of interest?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the House will know that this question has been raised before. The minister has complied not only with the conflict guidelines that existed when the government took office, but with the more stringent conflict of interest guidelines that exist now.

If the hon. member has a concrete allegation to make, he should make it outside the House. Otherwise, he should admit that he has no allegation of any kind with any substance.

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GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party named Glen Murray to its party's renewal commission, but Glen Murray is currently serving as the chair of the national round table on the environment and economy. Government appointees are not allowed to engage in partisan activities. After initially defending their decision, the Liberals eventually pulled Mr. Murray off the commission.

Could the government House leader assure the House that all government appointees will follow the rules?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is so disappointing about this is that this is the second time the Liberals attempted to appoint a Government of Canada appointee to a partisan position. I can assure the House that under this government, all government appointees will be expected to follow the rules and remain non-partisan.

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AGRICULTURE

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada's food supply is in serious jeopardy. Canadian farm income is showing the three worst years in history. Farms and our farm families are being forced out of production.

Will the hon. Minister of Agriculture act today to provide immediate aid to farmers so they can put seeds in the ground this spring? The survival of our rural way of life is at stake, as is our nation's food security.

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board (Canadian Wheat Board), CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government is reacting to meet the needs of Canadian farmers. We have already moved. We made a campaign promise to get out \$755 million to our farm community. That money is going out. We have a further commitment in our budgetary process to put \$2.5 billion over the next five years into the farm community.

Farmers have suffered under 13 years of failed Liberal farm programs and we intend to correct that.

[Translation]

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, \$500 million a year is not enough. Now is the time to act. It is shameful that the country's food supply is being seriously compromised. It is being compromised because our farmers cannot make ends meet. Canada's farmers and all Canadians deserve better.

Is the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food prepared to act now to resolve the farm income crisis?

• (1445)

[English]

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board (Canadian Wheat Board), CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I just said, we have acted in the interests of the Canadian farm community. We have delivered three-quarters of a billion dollars. Of that, \$470 million has already gone out. We continue to move on the agricultural community. We are committing another \$500 million through the budgetary process this year. We will work to protect our farmers and work with them to make them successful in this country.

* * *

GOODS AND SERVICES TAX

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, not so long ago the finance minister said that GST cuts were absolutely terrible, that they were knee-jerk reactions that do nothing for the economy, whereas that income tax cuts were absolutely wonderful, the cornerstone of the Mike Harris common sense revolution. Now, in the mother of all flip-flops, he is saying the absolute opposite: raise income tax to pay for a cut in the GST.

How can the minister have any credibility at all?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am opposed to temporary reductions in consumption taxes. I was then and I am now. What we are talking about in our platform and what we will do is bring in a permanent reduction of 1% in the GST, a reduction that I know the member opposite is opposed to. He wants us all to join his save the GST club but I am not joining.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that little word “temporary” will not do it.

The matter is very simple. If this budget does not flip into something that cuts income tax and improves Canada's competitiveness, then the budget will be a flop. Could the minister tell us when the budget will be?

[Translation]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. I would like to inform the House that the budget will be presented in the House on Tuesday, May 2, 2006.

* * *

[English]

AGRICULTURE

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, farmers continue to demonstrate for monetary action from the government to address the farm income crisis. Provincial ministers are calling for assistance and they are calling for it now.

Today, 21 farm leaders in an open letter and press conference addressed to the Prime Minister stated that action was needed immediately. The Prime Minister expressed his concern earlier but flip-flopped on producing immediate dollars.

Will the Prime Minister recognize the urgency of the situation, the cash shortfall, and commit funding immediately to deal with the farm crisis?

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board (Canadian Wheat Board), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised that the Liberals have the gall to stand up and even ask this question. They left the farmers completely without farm programs that worked. They left them with no biofuels program. They left them with virtually no income on their farms.

The Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture have addressed this problem. They have met with producers across the country. Two weeks ago they met with many of the same people who are asking for the meeting right now. The Prime Minister has made it clear that these issues will be dealt with in the budgetary process.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about gall. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister knows that the Conservative government has not contributed 13¢ to the farm community, not 13¢. The only money the Conservatives have put out is what the previous finance minister booked. This situation is urgent.

I might mention as well that the parliamentary secretary who just spoke wants to undermine the Canadian Wheat Board and take another \$200 million out of farmers' pockets.

When will the government act with actual funds and will it act today?

• (1450)

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board (Canadian Wheat Board), CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is too bad the member did not have that passion when he was on this side of the House.

The government has already delivered \$500 million to the farm community. There is another \$255 million coming from that first program. Another \$500 million has been committed in the budgetary process. We will look after our farmers.

* * *

[Translation]

CHILD CARE

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister said he expected all the parties to work for the well-being of the public. As far as the plan to allocate \$1,200 is concerned, the Bloc Québécois proposed amendments that would be fairer and still allow the government to make sure families get more money.

Can the Prime Minister promise to consider this measure the Bloc is proposing, which would allow him keep his promises and be more fair to families?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the campaign we promised Canadians two things. The first was \$1,200 a year, a choice in child care allowance to be paid directly to parents, not to provinces.

The second was a promise to work with businesses and community groups to create 125,000 new child care spaces right across this country.

We offered those things. Canadians chose them and we will deliver.

[Translation]

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a solid example for the minister. With his plan, a single parent family with two children on an income of \$28,000 will get only \$729, while in some situations, a family with an income of \$200,000 could get the full \$2,400 for two children.

Does the minister think this is fair and does she agree that the Bloc Québécois approach is better?

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we want to ensure our choice in child care allowance is truly a universal benefit, one that is not subjected to clawbacks by the provinces but one that is passed directly on to the parents. That is why I am very pleased to announce that so far five Canadian provinces have agreed not to do clawbacks. Unfortunately, Quebec is not yet one of those provinces.

I am hoping that Quebec is interested in seeing that parents get the full value for this money. I hope parents will encourage their provincial government to ensure that happens and Quebecers are not deprived.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Paul Zed (Saint John, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last year the then leader of the opposition met with team Saint John and we identified harbour clean up as our number one community priority. The Prime Minister promised to provide full funding. Last month the Prime Minister flip-flopped a token \$2.83 million. Harbour clean up has a price tag of \$88 million. This will not stop the sewage from being dumped into Saint John.

When will the Prime Minister live up to the promise that he made to provide \$44 million for Saint John?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the House will know, I recently met with Premier Lord in Saint John where we announced at long last the beginning of the project to clean up the Saint John harbour. This announcement was well received by all people in the area and by all levels of government. Unlike when the current member was in government, we are actually getting on with the job.

* * *

CHILD CARE

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP has been fearmongering by claiming massive clawbacks for parents who receive the \$1,200 a year child care allowance. Could the minister set the record straight on the issue?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we wanted to ensure that as many parents as possible received value out of our choice in child care allowance, we ensured it would only be taxed in the hands of the lower income spouse or parent. We have been working with the provinces to encourage them not to do clawbacks. I am very pleased to announce that British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Ontario, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island have all agreed to let parents have the benefit with no clawbacks. I hope this positive momentum will continue and that the other provinces and territories will join in.

* * *

●(1455)

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the recent situation in Caledonia highlights how federal government neglect of first nations' issues has created outrage right across Canada.

Will the minister agree to act on the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples which was explicitly put in place to prevent another situation like Oka from happening? These recommendations have been sitting for years without any action.

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I met this morning with Mr. David Ramsay, the Ontario minister.

The difficult situation in Caledonia is one that requires a certain amount of wisdom and forbearance. Talks aimed at addressing the specific issues relating to the occupation are continuing. Good progress has been made over the last several days.

On Saturday morning, April 22, an agreement was reached to develop a work plan that will provide for an effective way, I believe, to address and resolve the outstanding issues relating to the six nations and the governance issues. We are hopeful that together we can achieve a peaceful resolution.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Caledonia is only one situation in Canada as we sit here and speak.

Will the minister insist that the Indian Claims Commission be moved from under the thumb of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development so that its independence can be restored? Will he provide the commission with a full set of commissioners and the resources to get on with the job?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is worth noting that under the previous administration the number of specific claims in this country ballooned from approximately 300 to something approaching 850 specific claims requiring some analysis on our part.

In terms of Caledonia, it is our intention to move forward with appointing the necessary representatives to develop the work plan and to present it back to the parties. This is a difficult situation and I would request the forbearance, the wisdom and the patience of the House of Commons to have this resolved.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on April 21, 2004, I was deeply gratified as the Parliament of Canada voted to recognize the Armenian genocide. Today there continues to be human rights violations against the Kurds and the Cypriots in that part of the world.

When will the Prime Minister have the strength of his convictions and have his foreign minister officially recognize the Armenian and Pontian genocides committed by the Ottoman Empire?

Routine Proceedings

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite will note that the Prime Minister did acknowledge the terrible suffering and loss of life that occurred over 92 years ago with the Armenian people. In fact, he noted in his question as well that there were not only one but two motions passed in the Parliament of Canada in recent years and this government, as we did in opposition, supported those motions then as we do today.

* * *

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, through an audit into government contracting under the former government, it was found that former Liberal MP, David Smith, helped to circumvent contracting rules.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services tell us about this audit and how the new contracting procedures will protect Canadian taxpayers and open the process to small business?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we promised Canadians during the last election campaign, we will clean up government. The government's federal accountability act will create a procurement auditor to review procurement practices and respond to vendor complaints. A code of procurement will be established for both public servants and suppliers. Last week we announced the opening of six regional offices for small and medium sized enterprises to ensure that firms in every region of the country have access to government businesses.

Canadians voted for change on January 23 and we are giving the positive change and good government that all Canadians deserve.

* * *

[Translation]

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives promised to reopen the RCMP detachments that were closed in Quebec by the former government. They made that promise before and during the campaign and it is in black and white on page 26 of their election platform.

Does the government intend to keep its promise and reopen the RCMP detachments?

• (1500)

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under the former Liberal government the number of RCMP detachments was cut in the province of Quebec. We are going to change that.

The Prime Minister was very clear: we will increase resources for the RCMP and we can assure the citizens of Quebec that their streets and communities will be safer. We will make sure of it.

[English]

ARMENIA

The Speaker: Following discussions among representatives of all parties in the House, I understand there is an agreement to commemorate the Armenian genocide.

[Translation]

I call on hon. members to rise to observe a moment of silence.

[A moment of silence observed]

* * *

[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of His Excellency Cyril Svoboda, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

THE BUDGET

DESIGNATION OF ORDER OF THE DAY

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, further to the announcement during question period today regarding the date of the budget, I would like to inform the House that the presentation will take place at 4 p.m. on May 2.

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CERTIFICATES OF NOMINATION

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 110(2), I am tabling a certificate of nomination with respect to the Public Appointments Commission. The certificate stands referred to the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL BRIDGES AND TUNNELS ACT

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-3, An Act respecting international bridges and tunnels and making a consequential amendment to another Act.

*Routine Proceedings***PETITIONS**

HUMAN RIGHTS

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

* * *

•(1505)

[*English*]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-4, An Act to amend An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Income Tax Act.

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

* * *

PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY OF CANADA ACT

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-5, An Act respecting the establishment of the Public Health Agency of Canada and amending certain Acts.

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

* * *

WORKERS MOURNING DAY ACT

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP) seconded by the member for Malpeque, moved for leave to introduce C-224, An Act to amend the Workers Mourning Day Act (national flag to be flown at half-mast).

He said: Mr. Speaker, as everyone knows, April 28 is the day of mourning, honouring those people who go to work and suffer either a loss of life or a severe injury on the job.

In honour of those people who built our country and those workers who go to work every day and who do not get to go home at night or who become seriously injured either physically or mentally, the bill proposes that the national flag of Canada should be lowered on April 28 in recognition of those workers and their families.

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

* * *

PEST CONTROL PRODUCTS ACT

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP) moved for leave to introduce C-225, An Act to amend the Pest Control Products Act (prohibition of use of chemical pesticides for non-essential purposes).

He said: Mr. Speaker, the widespread use of chemical pesticides has been linked to cancer, neurological disorders and reproductive health concerns, especially among pregnant women and children. The bill would place a nation-wide moratorium on the cosmetic use of chemical pesticides in the home, in the garden, on golf courses or in recreational parks and so on until scientific evidence that such use is safe is presented to Parliament and passes a parliamentary committee.

The bill embraces and makes manifest the precautionary principle and reverses the burden of proof. Instead of us having to prove something is dangerous, let the companies prove that their product is safe. Then we will allow them to use it.

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

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of a number of my constituents of Mississauga South. This has to do with a report on March 8 in which a journalist revealed the existence of a concentration camp in Shenyang city in China expressly for Falun Gong practitioners. It has also been reported that no one has ever come out of that camp alive and that the practitioners have been killed for their organs.

The petitioners therefore urge the Government of Canada to strongly condemn the Chinese communist regime for crimes against Falun Gong practitioners.

•(1510)

[*Translation*]

THE COFFIN CASE

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am tabling a petition today from the people of the riding of Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine. They are asking the federal Minister of Justice to recommend a full review of the case of Wilbert Coffin, who was sentenced to death in 1954 and hung on February 10, 1956.

[*English*]

AGE OF CONSENT

Mr. John Williams (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by a number of people in my constituency. The petitioners ask my colleagues in Parliament to protect children from adult sexual predators by raising the age of consent from 14 to 18 years of age. While we may not go all the way to 18, we are going to hear their petition.

AUTISM

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by people in my constituency of Acadie—Bathurst. The petition is in regard to autism spectrum disorder.

The Address

The petitioners request Parliament to call upon the government to amend the Canada Health Act and corresponding regulations to include IBI and ABA therapy, a medically necessary treatment for children with autism, and that all provinces be required to fund this essential treatment for autism and contribute to the creation of an academic chair at a university in each province to teach IBI and ABA treatments to undergraduates and doctoral levels so Canadian professionals will no longer be forced to leave the country to receive academic training in the field and Canada will be able to develop the capacity to provide every Canadian with autism with the best IBI and ABA treatment available.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure to present a petition again, as I have done on every applicable day of the sitting of the House, from people who are concerned about the government's lack of a plan for child care.

This petition is from a place called The Growing Place, a child care centre in my constituency, which I visited last week. The petitioners say, among other things, that 70% of women with children under the age of six are employed, that a taxable \$100 a month allowance amounts to a child benefit and will not establish spaces and that child care is an everyday necessity in the country.

They call upon the Prime Minister and the government to honour the early learning and child care agreement in principle and to commit to fund it for a full five years.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again I come before the House and present a petition signed by many people across the country.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to immediately halt the deportation of undocumented workers and to find a humane and logical solution to their situation.

I might add that this weekend I had the pleasure to attend two rallies in Toronto held at Queen's Park and at city hall. The rallies gathered thousands of people from across the GTA who are concerned about the issues and the plight facing undocumented workers. They asked the government to find a logical and humane solution to their problems.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the citizens of Simcoe North, I have two petitions to table today. The first is a petition signed by 195 of my constituents from the riding of Simcoe North. It is an initiative by a Ms. Kelly Clune of my riding, who speaks out on environmental threats and issues and in so doing serves her community in a courageous and committed way.

The petitioners are concerned and believe that polyvinyl chlorides or PVCs are harmful during all stages of production, use and disposal. Given that this type of packaging is abundant and difficult for consumers to avoid and is in most cases not recycled or diverted from landfill and since sensible alternatives to PVCs exist, they ask that Parliament take steps to ban all PVC packaging.

●(1515)

TAXATION

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is signed on behalf of 29 of my constituents from the riding of Simcoe North. I note that this initiative is supported by no less than 11 associations representing up to 1.4 million retired persons.

The petitioners are asking for fairer treatment regarding income splitting. They note that other modern countries allow spouses living in the same household to pay taxes based on the total family income being equally earned. They ask Parliament to allow senior couples the option of splitting all individual retirement income for all pensions, private, superannuation and RIFFs as examples, in a manner that would equalize the taxes assessed to each spouse.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

[Translation]

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed consideration of the motion, as amended, for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session.

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on this last day of the debate on the Speech from the Throne. The government's throne speech has fortunately been amended by a Liberal amendment and a Bloc Québécois subamendment, dealing with the question of older workers' income when they lose their jobs.

The government's approach was to include all of the commitments it made during the election campaign in its Speech from the Throne. However, it forgot about a number of other aspects that have to be considered. This must be taken up by the government in what it is now doing. Its status as a minority government means that it had to accept that amendments be moved.

The Address

We hope that at the end of the day this Bloc Québécois amendment regarding the support program for older workers will be translated into a concrete measure in the next budget. We must recall that the program was in place before 1995, that it was abolished by the Liberal government at that point, and that it was not considered to be worthwhile to reintroduce it after that.

Today, it is even more worthwhile than ever. We are living in a time of global competition in which our manufacturing businesses have to face competition from every country in the world, and particularly the emerging nations. The consequences are very difficult for economic sectors such as the textile industry, the lumber industry and the furniture industry, all of them sectors that produce goods for which there is tough competition from the emerging nations, with the consequence that a lot of plants have been closed and people who have worked for the same business for 20, 25 or 30 years have been laid off. Those people have often paid employment insurance premiums for their entire career without ever drawing a penny. Now, when they lose their jobs in sectors where wages were not very high, they get a maximum of 45 weeks of employment insurance. After that, there are three, four or five years of uncertainty.

We hope that our industry and our economy, and the wealth it creates, will be able to benefit the people who are also the victims of this new competition. It is not a question of opting out of globalization, it is a question of putting a human face on it.

We have indeed made gains and we will be looking for markets. The government has to move forward by helping businesses and by having investment tax credits that allow for faster amortization.

On the other hand, we also have to make sure that the people who are victims of closures can enjoy some of the benefits, since our society is creating increased wealth. But there is a problem with the distribution of this wealth. The flagrant aspect that must absolutely be corrected is the situation of older workers.

I saw men and women in my riding, in Montmagny, when the Whirlpool company closed. I also saw some in the textile industry in Saint-Pamphile. I have been meeting them too throughout Quebec in the past few months, when we visit industries, when we have meetings with workers and with company owners who would like to see this type of program put in place.

So we very happy that the Bloc's amendment to the amendment was approved. We now hope that the government will move ahead. In the next budget speech, which has just been announced for May 2, they will have to find a way of giving form to the commitment expressed in the Speech from the Throne. Indeed, with regard to this subject and many others, a Speech from the Throne is a statement of principle, a statement of the government's commitments and guidelines.

In such a context, for example, the responsibility act, which the government is still calling the accountability act, is a plank from the election platform. We are going to study it in this House. The principle, as such, is interesting, but there will surely be a lot of amendments made to it before it becomes a viable bill that produces the expected results.

It is the same for the other aspects of the Speech from the Throne. There is one line, at most, that mentions competitiveness. For

example, everything we are told in the Speech from the Throne on the issue of the more competitive economy is that the government will promote a more competitive, more productive economy. This one sentence will have to lead to concrete action to ensure that our manufacturing companies can get appropriate assistance so that they can maintain their positions, move ahead and develop new markets in the face of new world competition.

• (1520)

It is important because of the current increase in the value of the dollar, because of other aspects of competition from the emerging countries and because of the rise in gas prices. These three things are making life very hard for our businesses. Governments must be sensitive to this and provide measures that will enable our businesses to maintain their productivity and their competitiveness. This will be possible with investment tax credits, accelerated amortization and also research and development programs to create new products. For example, a report was made public today on the marketing of new products. The upcoming budget will have to offer some tangible measures to this effect.

At the same time, the Speech from the Throne leaves out a lot, for example, the whole question of softwood lumber. We understood it from the ignorance of the Minister of Industry, who did not even know what a loan guarantee was. We seem to have backed down on our position towards the Americans. The government should go ahead so as to make sure our businesses can get through the crisis. As the situation stands now, we are going to win the legal battle, but there will no longer be any businesses left to celebrate the victory if we do not grant them loan guarantees to enable them to get through this trying period. We also have to send the Americans the message that we support our businesses and do not expect them to close up shop.

The same is true of agriculture. As we saw today, the first oral question from the Bloc Québécois was about this issue, which is a major concern. The agricultural sector is in the midst of an income crisis that will have a serious detrimental effect not only on our farmers but also on the economies of our rural communities. In Quebec, agriculture is the key factor in economic stabilization. Today, if interest rates were to go up by 2% or 3%, it would be disastrous. People are already in difficulty. The government seems to be doing nothing to address a number of issues, including the entry of products from the United States and the influx of new protein-based products that do not meet our agricultural standards. The government must act. Yet the throne speech does not say one word about this. We need concrete measures in this area.

I would also like to talk about employment insurance. In recent years, because of efforts by the Bloc Québécois and other members of this House, the government has set up pilot projects that have resulted in a special status for seasonal workers in areas of high unemployment. This has allowed them to earn a little more money without having their benefits cut.

The Address

One of these measures expires on June 4, 2006. It is the addition of five weeks of benefits to the conventional schedule to eliminate or at least substantially reduce what is called the springtime black hole. Seasonal workers who work for 20 or 25 weeks are entitled to about 30 weeks of benefits. Before the new season starts, they are without an income for four to eight weeks. That is what is called the spring black hole or gap.

We managed to get a three-year pilot project established that gave these workers five additional weeks of benefits. This pilot project runs out in June. It is important for the government to announce a three-year extension very soon so that it lasts as long as the other measures that were taken to protect seasonal workers. This would give us a more solid set-up to protect our seasonal workers.

This is not tantamount to giving these people charity. Our regional economies need the seasonal work. It is an important part of our economy. We expect the government to act quickly.

The government took the fact that it is a minority into account. This was reflected in the Speech from the Throne. The government consulted the other party leaders, which made it possible to arrive at amendments that enriched the speech. The proof can be seen in the fact that at no stage was a recorded division needed. Ultimately, the House is satisfied with this amended Speech from the Throne.

Beginning tomorrow, the government should take specific steps to honour the commitments it made in the Speech from the Throne. That is what Quebeckers expect. They expect it especially in regard to an international presence for Quebec and the fiscal imbalance. In the latter case, urgent action is needed.

• (1525)

In conclusion, I hope to see the government take specific steps to accomplish what was promised in the Speech from the Throne, especially the measure to assist older workers who lose their jobs.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first off, I congratulate my colleague from Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup on the quality of his speech and on highlighting the major shortcomings of this throne speech, namely as concerns the social safety net for the public in general and workers in particular. I am grateful to him as well for stressing the employment insurance program.

I would like to hear what he has to say about the fate of the employment insurance fund over the years. How is it that, today, nearly 60% of workers contributing to EI cannot expect to receive benefits when they are laid off? How did the misappropriation of the fund occur over the past 10 years? We will likely see the impact that has had on the employment insurance program, of course, and on the use made of the funds.

In short, should the money misappropriated from the EI fund be returned to it and how must that be done?

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. It brings a terrible situation to light.

In the years of Liberal government, that is, from 1993-94 to last year, the government systematically collected employment insurance contributions, year in and year out. However, this money went to

something other than the employment insurance plan. The amount misappropriated and used for purposes other than for what it was intended was \$48 billion. It went to fund government spending, spending of a totally different sort.

The Liberal government turned employment insurance contributions into a payroll tax, but did not honour the spirit of the fund. Accordingly, programs that appeared totally relevant and improvements to the plan that appeared equally relevant were not put in place. The money had been already allocated elsewhere.

How do they explain the fact that there is no program for older workers—there was one until 1995—when surpluses are being accumulated year after year?

The answer to this question is to put in place, as soon as possible, an independent employment insurance fund, a fund in which the contributions of employers and employees will be used only for the employment insurance program, cannot be used to finance other activities of the government, and cannot be used to finance repayment of the debt. It is disgraceful to have the debt repaid on the back of the most disadvantaged people in society when high-income earners have not had to make such an effort when it was time to do so. There has been no return on investment for those who have done their part, through the employment insurance fund itself. There have been no benefits for them. So this is an important element which we do not find in the throne speech. It would have been interesting to see the Conservatives return to the position they held when they were in opposition, that is, accept the idea of an independent fund, set it up and ensure that we can move in that direction.

What will they do about the surpluses in the fund that have been misappropriated? What will they do to ensure that the people who have been denied them can have the benefit of them?

I hope that the idea of an independent employment insurance fund is put back on the table as soon as possible, is adopted by this government, and I hope we can look into how to ensure that the funds that were diverted in the past can be used to finance programs that are very much justified. For example, we could convert certain pilot projects dealing with seasonal workers, who survive from year to year, into permanent programs. In that way our seasonal industries would be recognized for what they are, and our regional industries could guarantee their own continuity. We expect this sort of action on the part of the government. Let us learn from the past and close this loophole, which was used by the Liberal government for many years.

The Address

It is the duty of the Conservative government not only to denounce what the Liberals have done, but also to put a program in place. In recent years the Bloc Québécois has proposed certain bills. The government could easily revisit them to ensure that this happens and that we create fairness in this employment sector again, because one never knows, even in a period of economic growth, what the needs will be one year, two years or three years down the road. Even in a period of great economic growth, there are always sectors that do not achieve the same results. That is why it is important for the government to take this sort of action.

•(1530)

[English]

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Leeds—Grenville.

First, I would like to thank the people of Chatham-Kent—Essex for the confidence and trust they have placed in me by giving me the great and noble honour of representing them in this, the 39th Parliament.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my wife, who is sitting here today in the gallery, as well as the rest of my family for the support they have given me over the past few years to help make it possible for me to be here today.

I would also like to thank the Minister of Agriculture for coming to Chatham-Kent—Essex and meeting with 30 farm leaders, including the grassroots group, and five local members of Parliament to discuss and hear their ideas and suggestions toward the creation of a new, workable farm program, one that will ensure future prosperity for all Canadian farmers.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment to the Chair. I look forward to working with you and all 307 of my colleagues in this Parliament.

I would like to take this time to honour the soldiers who gave their lives and to offer my most humble and sincere condolences to their families. We are forever indebted to their bravery and sacrifice. God bless all of them.

Our military is fighting for a strong Canada, defending our sovereignty and giving security to our citizens. Internationally, it is becoming more and more apparent that we are living in an increasingly dangerous and hostile world where many do not share our world vision, but if we are to be a light to the nations, a beacon of hope to the oppressed, we need to encourage others to share in the blessings and benefits of democracy and freedom. We must be ever vigilant.

Our anthem states, “O Canada, we stand on guard for thee”. Standing guard implies a show of force, a deterrent to those who war against free speech, freedom of religion and freedom-loving people, and so we support the government’s resolve to strengthen our military and supply our brave men and women in our forces with the equipment and training they so desperately need.

I am proud of the bravery displayed by our forces in Afghanistan. My parents came from a country that was overtaken by a foreign army led by a murderous tyrant who posed a horrific threat to

mankind’s struggle for freedom. My father fought in the underground and lost a brother to the Nazi death camps. I know at first hand what the fight for freedom has brought my family. If it were not for the bravery shown by the Canadian Forces back in World War II, many, including me, would not be able to share in our blessed freedom. Today, children in the Netherlands gather every May 5 and lay flowers at the graves of the mighty and the brave who fought for freedom. Let me say with the Netherlands what has been said since May 1945, “Thanks, Canada”.

On January 23, the people of Chatham-Kent—Essex voted overwhelmingly to clean up government. I support the government’s commitment to change the way we do business in Ottawa with the tabling of the new federal accountability act. The act will bring openness and transparency to government and will renew public trust in our institutions and elected officials.

The GST reduction is also something that is being eagerly awaited by the people of my riding. They are tired of paying high taxes. This reduction is a clear indication of the direction the government is taking and will continue to take, giving back to hard-working Canadians the money they have earned and need. This is a visible tax reduction. Perhaps the government’s brave action may spur on similar actions in our provincial governments.

In Windsor this summer, along with leaders in law and security, I had the privilege to sit with the task force on safe streets and healthy communities. I listened as they expressed their concerns and their frustration with a system that is failing Canadians and hog-tying law enforcement officers. I am encouraged by the government’s commitment to bring back safe communities by tackling crime and improving the security of our border.

I personally have two sons who serve as police officers and have seen and heard the frustration experienced by the men and women in blue who guard our streets and homes. They need and deserve our support and they welcome a government that is working with them to improve our nation’s law enforcement.

•(1535)

As the father of eight children, I, with my wife, am especially proud of this government’s commitment to support our families with the commitment to encourage families to choose and to make their choices for child care. As a parent, I can assure members that parents know and want to make the choice for child care. The parents of Chatham-Kent—Essex have repeatedly expressed support for this program.

The people of my riding are expressing an increasing level of angst about patient wait times. Our government’s commitment of a patient wait time guarantee is long overdue and is welcomed by all with whom I have discussed the plan. Our government will finally provide Canadians with the quality health care they deserve.

The government has also made a commitment to the great people of Quebec, something that the people of Chatham-Kent—Essex applaud. This government shares with the people of Quebec its vision of an open and federalist Canada that recognizes a Quebec in a united Canada. The prospects of mutual respect and collaboration have proven to attract Quebecers, as evidenced by the strong results made by this party in the last election.

The Address

I am also encouraged by the government's direction of restoring and improving relations with our best friend and trading partner. In Chatham-Kent—Essex, the importance of good relations with the United States is especially so for our vegetable and greenhouse growers, who rely on open borders without delay, as most of their product goes south to over 200 million customers. They must get their products there quickly.

The greenhouse growing industry around the town of Leamington in our riding is the largest in North America. The hard-working people who operate these facilities and those who are dependent on its well-being deserve nothing less.

Manufacturers in our riding are also committed to timely delivery of the products by way of just in time delivery. We need open borders.

We have a saying in Chatham-Kent—Essex where we remind one another that we cannot curse our neighbours and expect to sit at their banquet table.

We are indeed privileged to serve, in these great halls, a great and brave people, and I am proud to serve today with a government which will ensure that the principles of honesty, integrity, hard work, family values, justice and bravery will be lived out in a place that rewards the people of this great land with a good and honest government that cares for the needs of all its people.

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand in this place today and take this opportunity to speak in response to the Speech from the Throne that was delivered earlier this month by Her Excellency the Governor General.

As our leader the Prime Minister stated on January 23 Canadians voted for change. They rejected 13 years of scandal and inaction. They rejected business as usual. They said that it was time for government to turn a new leaf. They asked us to make those changes and turn that new leaf.

The Speech from the Throne introduces those changes. It marks a turning point for the Government of Canada. It marks a change whereby the government will be more responsive to Canadians.

Some in this place have criticized that speech. I say it sets a solid foundation from which to launch a new era in our history. I say that although we have outlined five priorities, some of those are huge undertakings and once those foundations have been laid, we can continue forward.

In the recent election our party promised to act immediately on five key issues: accountability in government, choice in child care, cracking down on crime, working with the provinces to produce a health care wait time guarantee, and lowering the GST. The Speech from the Throne outlines these priorities.

It is important to note that the Speech from the Throne is just that, an outline, like a report on a book. It cannot possibly be expected to present all the details.

All of these priorities are important in my riding of Leeds—Grenville and the citizens in my riding are supportive. Two weeks ago we heard some of the details that flow from the Speech from the Throne as the government introduced the federal accountability act.

Anyone who has read that will understand how the five priorities, although seemingly short, are merely a shell of the work that has to be accomplished to meet these five priorities.

The Speech from the Throne offered more than only these five priorities. It also spoke to other concerns in my riding. One of these issues is agriculture. Once again we saw farmers here on Parliament Hill today. Agriculture is of great concern in my riding of Leeds—Grenville because it is a rural riding. When there is a problem in the agriculture sector it ripples through the economy throughout my riding and throughout our country. It affects almost everyone.

Over the past few years our farmers have been reeling as they lurch from one crisis to another. The beef industry, the dairy industry, grains and oilseeds, and pork; all sectors have felt the heavy hand of fate. I was pleased to see that agriculture was included in the Speech from the Throne. I am pleased to know that this government is committed to our farmers.

I want to spend the majority of my time today talking about the government's priorities in tackling crime. This too is an issue in my riding, especially because we have two major border crossings along the southern edge of my riding. From my riding we can see the United States. In fact, the people of Leeds—Grenville and other ridings along the St. Lawrence River have a long and proud history with our neighbours to the south, dating from before Confederation. Culturally and economically we have always been neighbours in the true sense of the word.

Despite the global threats of terrorism, the law-abiding residents of my riding who live and work along the border continue to view the border as something they need to work with to help our economy. They must be able to travel back and forth to work to improve that economy.

We also live in a world full of threats. Criminals take advantage of the good nature of our relationship with the United States and continue to smuggle guns, drugs, people and many other items and commodities across that border. This is big business to this element of society in Canada and the United States and it is an expensive business.

As a result, the threats to the men and women who are employed by the Canada Border Services Agency increase each and every year. During the last Parliament we learned that an independent report which stated that our border guards should be armed was altered to state that they should not be armed. I and others stood in this place and asked why the government continued to place our border guards at serious risk. Since then we have seen examples of border guards walking away from their posts when they learned of approaching threats.

We have also learned of the results of another study that has also concluded that Canadian border guards should be armed. I am pleased to say that the Speech from the Throne stated that the government will improve the security of our borders.

The Address

• (1540)

I am also pleased that the government, through the Minister of Public Safety and the Minister of Justice, is working on options to ensure that our border guards will be better protected from those in the criminal community who would threaten them. We cannot adequately protect our country if our borders are porous because our border security is weak. I applaud these announcements.

I am also pleased that other crime and security measures were introduced in the throne speech. While my riding is not known for crime, the people of Leeds and Grenville certainly have opinions about crime and justice. They were sickened by the Liberal approach to chronic and serious offenders. They do not subscribe to the hug a thug mantra of the former government. They are tired of the revolving door in and out of jails for those committing the worst crimes in our country. They are tired of watching criminals receive double time credits for time served before trial. They are tired of bargains and cop-outs. I know that they are heartened by the announcement in the Speech from the Throne that this government will crack down on crime.

Personally I will continue my pursuit of mandatory prison sentences for people who commit murder with knives. Several years ago a promising young man from my riding, Andy Moffit, was killed here in Ottawa in a bar fight with a knife. In the last Parliament I introduced a private member's bill calling for mandatory prison sentences for those who use knives in killings. For Andy's family I will continue to pursue this legislation. Deterrents for those tossing knives in their pockets, knives that often end up being used in the commission of crimes, must be in place.

Canadians, including those in Leeds and Grenville, have a right to feel safe and secure in their own communities and in those communities they choose to visit. They are pleased that this government will bring in legislation to restrict the use of conditional sentences for serious crimes. They are pleased that this government will bring in legislation to increase mandatory prison sentences for firearms offences. They are pleased that this government will put more police officers on the streets. They are pleased that this government will do all this while addressing the issue of at risk youth to ensure we no longer breed criminals. This government will do this by working with the provinces, territories and other partners to support solutions that end the cycle of violence that can lead to broken lives.

Canadians elected a new government on January 23. They elected a new government to effect change in Canada and to turn a new leaf. We promised to work on five key issues that affect all Canadians. The Speech from the Throne shows Canadians that we meant what we promised during the election and that we intend to keep those promises.

• (1545)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the hon. member for Leeds—Grenville, for his speech. I would like to ask him about one point he made, which was that the Speech from the Throne sets the foundation for the policy announced by the Conservative government. The hon. member will recognize, as I do, that something very important is missing in the

Speech from the Throne. It does not address employment insurance, which affects workers.

The Conservatives promised to create an independent employment insurance fund. They did so when they were in opposition, voting with us on this matter. During the election campaign and after their election, the Prime Minister and his party promised to create this fund. Why is there no mention of this in the Speech from the Throne? This is my first question.

My second question also concerns the employment insurance fund. Like us, the Conservatives recognized that the money diverted from the employment insurance fund over the last 10 years by the previous government—an amount totaling \$48 billion—must be returned to that fund. There is nothing on this in the throne speech. Nor is there any indication in the speeches given by members of the current government to suggest that they still intend to return this money.

I would like my colleague to address these concerns. How can he explain this significant omission in the Speech from the Throne?

[*English*]

Mr. Gord Brown: Mr. Speaker, that is an important question because there are a lot of issues to do with the EI fund and how it was managed by the former government, but the fact is that we are putting forward the five priorities that we fully intend to act upon at this time. We made many promises in the election campaign. Canadians are going to find that this party and this government will deliver on its promises.

• (1550)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to announce that I will be splitting my time with the member from Beaches—East York.

First of all, I would like to thank the voters and all the volunteers in the riding of West Nova who returned me to Ottawa for a third term. It is an honour and a pleasure to be here with my colleagues.

[*English*]

It is an honour and a privilege to be here to speak in response to the Speech from the Throne.

Like many Canadians, I was quite concerned with what I heard on April 4.

Over the last 15 years the previous government had fiscally responsible budgets and built a very strong economy. We eliminated the deficit in 1997. We delivered seven consecutive surpluses. We reduced the national debt by more than \$61 billion. At the same time we reduced taxes and made important strategic investments in our social and economic priorities.

Despite such a good economic track record, however, there is a complete lack of vision on the other side of the House. Having inherited such a good financial situation, the Conservatives still have no idea where they want to bring this country. The Speech from the Throne is an important opportunity to outline the government's vision for our country.

The Address

The Prime Minister squandered this opportunity and delivered a stump speech that was long on rhetoric but short on substance. His pamphlet from the throne does little to address the issues that matter in rural Nova Scotia and particularly in West Nova, which is why I want to take this opportunity to speak for the residents of my constituency and raise but a few of their concerns.

In many ways my riding is a microcosm of rural Canada and Canada itself. Our local economy is dominated by manufacturing, a military base, agriculture, the fur industry, fishing, tourism and others. Our communities are vibrant centres. I am proud to represent such hard-working and dedicated Canadians. They deserve better than the government plans to deliver.

In an area dominated by the fishing industry, wharves are essential to the long term economic sustainability of my riding. It is important that the government develop and maintain a responsible way to manage these wharves and protect the way of life. The community of Digby illustrates this issue well.

In 1999 the Government of Canada transferred ownership of the wharf of Digby to the Maritime Harbour Society, along with \$3 million for its upkeep. The transfer has been a dismal failure. The wharf is in a state of disrepair. Serious allegations have been raised about the use of the funds. After several years of legal proceedings, the arbitrator has finally reported his findings. There is no longer any reason to delay the return of this wharf to the community that depends on it for its livelihood.

When the Conservatives were in opposition, they said they would take quick and immediate action to resolve this situation. During the election they repeated this promise. The situation in Digby is not the fault of government, but it alone has the capability of remedying it. I call on the government to do it immediately, as well as to invest in all our wharves.

[*Translation*]

The concern that people from southwestern Nova Scotia, and from all regions of Atlantic Canada, may have is investment in regional economic development. For Atlantic Canada, the ACOA is very important. We have made major progress. There have been major investments in Atlantic Canada and there are lots of projects under way.

We are uncertain about what the future holds for us with the next government. We know that the minister responsible for the ACOA should be very familiar with the issues. Still, he is also the minister responsible for Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and foreign affairs. He does not have a lot of time and his parliamentary secretaries are not from the Atlantic provinces. We do not know what the intentions of this government and its prime minister are concerning these investments, and we are asking for some clarifications.

[*English*]

Probably no issue better illustrates the difference in thinking between the current government and 70% of Canadians than early childhood development. The Conservatives have an idea and a principle, and we have to recognize the fact that they formed the government and some elements of their principles have been respected or adopted by Canadians.

Those members talk about choices for Canadians. Not all Canadians want their young children to be in day care or early learning institutions or groups or other things. They may want their children to be in family settings. We must recognize that, and I accept that. However, when those members talk about choices, it means that the options must be there in communities for people to make those choices. Without a true investment in early childhood education, those choices cannot be there. They cannot be there for western Nova Scotia.

The government can talk about all the tax breaks and tax advantage negotiations it wants, but those tax breaks will not get to rural Canada or to the official minority language communities. Those tax breaks will not increase the salaries of workers in day care facilities across this country who have to raise funds to pay themselves a minimum wage in order to take care of our next generation. We depend on these people. That requires an investment. There can be other options such as the at home option.

I do not think a direct transfer to parents is a bad idea. I would support the federal government because it ran on that. The government has the right, and I would even say the responsibility, to do that. How to do it is the question?

Can there be a compromise? Can the government recognize the fact that 64% or 66% of the people in Canada voted for other parties who had another vision? Can the government not give some direct transfers to families and still invest in early childhood education across this country? Can the government not recognize the fact that expenses do not stop at six years of age, that investment has to be continually made in those children?

If the government is going to make transfers, then why look at a system which would give more money to the wealthy and less to the needy? Why not increase the amount of money in child tax credits, for example, which assists the more needy? There are compromises to be had. I want to work with the governing party to achieve those compromises in the interest of all Canadians.

Another area that the government talks about, and which I agree with, is tax relief, but I believe it has to be strategic. It has to be well done and it has to be done in a way that would sustain our communities and our society, and invests in our competitiveness for the future. A reduction in GST alone will not assist a lot if it comes with a decrease in basic personal exemptions, and if it comes with an increase in taxes to lower income Canadians and moderate income Canadians. It will not help those families.

However, it will help the person who is buying a brand new Mercedes Benz. One-fifteenth of the tax on that would be a bit less money. A reduction in GST alone will not help families in Nova Scotia that are struggling to make ends meet where the vast majority of their revenue is going toward buying basic needs that are already GST free. Why not look at a way to have a balanced tax reduction that would help those who need it the most?

The Address

Education is not mentioned in the Speech from the Throne. Does the government not recognize the necessity of secondary and post-secondary education?

• (1555)

[*Translation*]

Is it not true that the costs of this education are rising in Canada, especially in the regions, whether in the minority or majority language? Students' debt load continues to increase.

We had presented a plan to that effect. The government may not want to accept it as is, but it could at least study it in order to see whether there are any elements that could be adopted. Could we not invest in our institutions? Could we not ensure the competitiveness of our country and future generations?

We have to recognize what has been achieved in Canada since 1992 with investments in our universities and investments in research and development. We have also talked about the brain drain and the exodus of Canadians who have to go to the ends of the earth to find work. In recent years, we have realized that people want to come to Canada. In Halifax, there are even investments for companies such as Research in Motion. We have seen some 1,200 positions created thanks to investments from the federal government.

This way we would encourage people to carry on, we would encourage our governments and the development of our universities.

[*English*]

I speak of universities, but I could speak of community colleges or trade schools. I could speak of all sorts of educational opportunities that are out there supporting our economy that our students and our workers need access to and that require investment.

I recognize that the governing party won the election and it has an agenda to put forward. I ask those members to recognize the fact that they won a minority government, and Canadians expect them to compromise and to work with the other parties. Maybe Canadians were tired of us in government and wanted a change, but that does not mean that they wanted a whole scale change in policy and direction, and the ways things were going. It is time to study and look at those things.

Canadians in Atlantic Canada are still afraid of the Prime Minister. In my riding, they sometimes call him a shrub. I am a francophone, but I believe that is the proper English word for a small bush. We must demonstrate that we are still an independent country. This is Canada. We must demonstrate that we can govern ourselves for the betterment of Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

• (1600)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking the voters in Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques for placing their trust in me for the second time. I want to assure them that I will do everything I can to represent them effectively.

I thank my colleague for his remarks. He touched on something that is dear to my heart and an important issue to the vast majority of voters in my riding: port infrastructure. As my colleague knows,

there are several ports in the beautiful lower St. Lawrence region. We also have a pressing need for investment.

I would appreciate knowing the hon. member's opinion on the port infrastructure divestiture program and the urgent need to renew that program. In his speech, he gave one example. I will give another. People on both sides of the St. Lawrence, in both Les Escoumins and Trois-Pistoles, need an immediate response from the government. They are waiting for an answer. It is disappointing that the throne speech says nothing about transportation infrastructure, particularly ports.

I would like to know the member's opinion about the urgent need to renew the program. When municipalities or corporations so choose, when intermunicipal boards are created, they should be able to take advantage of divestiture programs in future in order to help the regional economy recover, in my region as in his.

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to have been part of the previous government and I am also very proud of our accomplishments.

As a parliamentarian, a member of Parliament, an individual and a citizen from a rural area, I must admit that all of our programs did not function fully everywhere. The port divestiture program was good for Montreal, Halifax, Vancouver and perhaps St. John's. As far as the smaller ports are concerned, there were major difficulties. In some cases, it was an utter failure.

It takes maturity to overhaul these programs and recognize that for some facilities, whether the public ports or part of the infrastructure, an overhaul is absolutely necessary. We all pay a little bit through our taxes for maintaining the economy of all these regional and rural communities.

I am talking about the port of Digby, but there are others in our country. The hon. member knows about a number of them I am sure.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague's speech. I always enjoy listening to him in the House because he certainly gets a lot of words in during his speech in the House. He has mentioned a couple of things that I certainly agree with that are concerns about the Speech from the Throne.

The first is child care. I had a chance last week to visit three more child care centres in my riding which were really concerned that after years of hope we finally had made some progress. People had a real sense that something was coming that was going to transform child care in Canada and they were disappointed.

I want to ask the member specifically though about the issue of regional development. He touched on it briefly. In Atlantic Canada, there is a great deal of concern about regional development. ACOA is an institution that has made a big difference in the economic well-being of Atlantic Canadians.

The Address

In this Parliament, we have one minister from Nova Scotia who is the minister for both ACOA and foreign affairs. We believe in Atlantic Canada that Canada has a big role to play in the world. We also think it has a big role to play in Atlantic Canada. I wonder if the member could give us his view about how concerned he might be about the future of regional development in Atlantic Canada.

• (1605)

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to see the important position that the member from Pictou received. He is a well respected member of the House and as Minister of Foreign Affairs I wish him very well. It is a very difficult portfolio. However, being a cabinet minister takes up all of the time of this member of Parliament and to think that one can do that and be the regional minister for two provinces.

In Quebec, the government did not even think it had enough members of Parliament for a minister to be responsible for Montreal. It had to bring in a senator from outside to do that. However, the government brought in a member from Nova Scotia to be responsible for ACOA.

What I fear is the signal that it sends, of the importance that the Prime Minister gives to ACOA and regional economic development. It seems a little like an afterthought. He had a minister with seven other responsibilities and two parliamentary secretaries from other parts of the country. Therefore, I am quite fearful and we will be watching it closely.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour and privilege to once again join my colleagues in this House to discuss and debate issues of pressing concern to our constituents.

I would like to thank the voters of Beaches—East York for the confidence they have once again placed in me as their representative. I am grateful for their continued support and I will work hard to ensure that their views are well-represented in this House.

I must say that the recent Speech from the Throne was very disappointing to me because it failed to address a number of issues of pressing concern to Canadians.

The speech contained some catchy phrases but very few real measures to address the concerns of Canadians. Canadians deserve more than government slogans. Nowhere is the need to go beyond slogans more apparent than in the area of early education and child care.

The government has adopted the phrase “choice in child care” to represent its views on the issue. In light of what the government has said about its intentions so far, I can only assume that the phrase is meant to be ironic. In fact, if the government insists on moving forward in the direction it has suggested, it will leave many parents with no choice at all. One cannot buy something that does not exist, and the government's plan will not create any new child care spaces.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business says tax incentives for business will not create new child care spaces. This approach did not work in Ontario under the Harris government and it has not worked in New Brunswick. The minister responsible admits that this is true, but proposes to move ahead with it anyway.

The minister believes that the not for profit community will create new spaces, but does not say where we will get the money for this. The minister has talked about a one time only funding to cover some of the capital costs of starting up a child care facility. The experts agree that this approach will not work either and this government knows it will not work.

The only way to increase the number of quality early learning and child care spaces available to Canadians is through sustained, multi-year funding. This is the one approach this government refuses to consider.

Early education and child care is not just a social policy; it is also an economic policy. Our prosperity and productivity are directly affected by how much we invest in early childhood development. So is the level of poverty in our society.

As the governor of the Bank of Canada, David Dodge, put it, “the first step to improving skills is to build an excellent infrastructure for early childhood development”.

The development of the brain starts very early in life and the early years are the most important for cognitive development. The level of support we provide for early education has a big impact on the ability of our citizens to learn later in life. As such, it has a direct impact on their economic prospects.

The vast majority of Canadian parents work. Approximately 70% of women with children under the age of six are employed. For these women, child care is not optional; it is an economic necessity. Depending on their income level and the number of income earners in their household, the proposed child care allowance is likely to provide them with somewhere between \$1.50 and \$4.00 a day for child care; a fraction of the actual cost. This is not a child care policy. I hasten to add that this is also not an effective income support policy.

A recent report by the Caledon Institute pointed out that after taxes and clawbacks of other benefits, the overwhelming majority of Canadian families will receive much less than the proposed \$1,200. The biggest losers will be the modest income families in the \$30,000 to \$40,000 range. To quote the Caledon Institute, “The distribution of benefits makes no social or economic sense”.

In fact, the plan does not live up to basic standards of fairness. It would pay working poor families less than upper income families and would also favour one earner families over single parent families and two earner families. This is a double injustice.

When it comes to ensuring that the needs of children are met in this country, we already have an appropriate mechanism for income support. It is called the national child benefit.

The Address

If the Conservative government wants to improve income support for parents, including those who choose to stay at home, it should increase the Canada child tax credit and raise the income level at which a family qualifies for it.

Not only does the government not believe in early education and care, it appears from the throne speech that it does not place a high priority on education at any level. There was no mention of post-secondary education in the throne speech.

By contrast, the previous Liberal government assisted more than 20,000 students in low income families with their first year of tuition by creating the Canada access grants.

●(1610)

In our economic and fiscal update last fall, we proposed to extend these grants through all four years of an undergraduate degree. We also proposed a new fifty-fifty plan to pay for half of the first and last year's tuition for all undergraduate studies. Given the current government's seeming lack of ideas in this area, I think I speak for my colleagues in saying that we would not mind if it borrowed one or two of ours.

There were a number of other priorities that were neglected in the throne speech as well. There is no time to recount all of them but very briefly we would like to call attention to the following areas.

There was no mention in the Speech from the Throne of affordable housing, a very critical area of need. In particular, the government should clarify whether it intends to follow through on the commitment of \$1.6 billion in additional spending outlined in the Liberal budget.

Cities were also neglected in the throne speech. There was no mention of infrastructure, additional money for public transit or continued transfers of a portion of the gas tax. In short, there was no vision for the future of our cities.

I am also concerned about the lack of priority given to the environment. The government has stated that it has no intention of meeting our targets under the Kyoto protocol and has already cut a large percentage of federal funding for climate change programs. It talks about a made in Canada solution, as if project green, our Kyoto implementation plan, were written in some other country. Canada is now in the embarrassing position of chairing the post-Kyoto implementation of the UN framework on climate change with a government that is not committed to Kyoto itself. The government should clarify whether it intends to pull out of Kyoto or whether it intends to simply ignore our commitments under the protocol. Either way, it is a disgrace for Canada.

Seniors were also left out of the Speech from the Throne. Issues that have direct bearing and impact on their well-being were simply not mentioned: the privatization of our health care system that affects all of us, but especially our aging population; the improvement of long term care, which is very fundamental and needs to be developed; affordable housing, which I mentioned earlier but bears mentioning here because it is something that affects the senior population very directly and it is absolutely necessary that we do something about that. These are areas that were left out.

I might say that I was also quite surprised not to see a mention of women's issues. These are all women's issues but for women in general, the pay equity issue was not mentioned and the gender based analysis which has to be done sooner or later in this country if we are to ensure that we have equity.

Again there is the issue of diversity and multiculturalism. The Prime Minister did not even appoint a minister for multiculturalism. When I asked the question of the minister a couple of weeks ago, she said that the program was being reviewed. Multiculturalism is not a project. It is not a program that is funded. It is a philosophy. It is a policy. It is a vision of this country. It affects every department and it needs to have a minister at the table to enforce that philosophy and to ensure that every department across the government implements the philosophy of multiculturalism, otherwise people are left out. Exclusivity is lost because policies have to be formed by the multiculturalism and diversity philosophy. If not, policies in this country will be developed and will miss the mark. They will miss the fact that some policies will create barriers without anyone knowing about it.

Multiculturalism is fundamental to this country. We have a multiculturalism act. A section in the Constitution talks about multiculturalism but we do not have a minister for the first time since 1972. The present government is the first ever not to appoint a separate multiculturalism minister. This is offensive, to say the least, to the issue of diversity. The government likes to talk a great deal about diversity in this country and yet does nothing about it. I have no minister to go to. No one has a minister to go to. Quite frankly, multiculturalism is not part of the title of the minister who answered the question and therefore she is not the minister responsible and should not have answered the question. On the day I asked it there actually was nobody in the House to answer the question which says something about the government's position on that issue.

I really feel that the government has a long way to go before it comes anywhere close to meeting the needs of the nation.

●(1615)

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as this is the first time you have been in the chair when I have addressed the House I would like to congratulate you on your appointment as acting Speaker.

The Prime Minister will ask Parliament to approve the choice in child care allowance. I wonder why the member for Beaches—East York does not support giving \$1,200 per child. Does she prefer the status quo, which is zero? It is clear where the government stands. Now it is time for the Liberal Party to stand up for universal child care.

Canada's new government's approach requires no federal-provincial negotiations, no funding for academics, researchers or special interest groups, and it cuts out the political and bureaucratic middle men. It will provide real support and direct payment as soon as Parliament approves it.

The Address

The previous government spent a lot of time talking about child care but, after 13 years of rhetoric, no one can find those universally free, readily accessible, federally created day care spaces. Ordinary parents who work hard, pay their taxes and play by the rules do not have a taxpayer funded lobby group. They do not hold demonstrations and make regular trips to Ottawa for news conferences but they support our plan. We intend to support them by keeping our promise of making choice in child care a reality.

The national child care program never materialized and now Canadian parents are waiting for the opposition parties to stand up for them, like the government is standing up for parents, the experts in child care, mom and dad. Where did all the money go with zero spots created under the previous Liberal government?

Hon. Maria Minna: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows full well that is not true. In Toronto, the \$5 billion investment would have provided 6,000 new spaces this year alone, never mind the commitment for the next 10 years. I will not even go there.

The fact is that just because the government has a slogan that says “choice in child care allowance” does not mean there is any choice. There is choice for some parents but not for all parents. It is quite clear, because this taxable, that it would actually raise the income level of families to \$30,000 or \$40,000 where they would lose. Not only do they not get enough of the \$1,200, they only get about 32%, they also lose other benefits like the child tax credit because this would raise their incomes.

This is not a choice. It would not create any new spaces and if there are no spaces what do they choose from? They cannot choose from anything. This gives absolutely nothing. This is empty rhetoric and it would actually hurt families. It chooses among some and not others. It chooses some families and leaves out others. Single earner families would benefit but double earner families would not. Low income families would benefit and upper income families might. This is absolutely unacceptable.

There are no spaces to choose from. No spaces are being created. The \$1,200 child care allowance is a figment of somebody's imagination. The way it would work is totally unfair. It would hit some families but miss others. It is totally unacceptable and there is absolutely nothing to choose from.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since this is the first time on my feet in the 39th Parliament I would like to extend my thanks to my constituents for returning me to this place. I am deeply honoured and hope I live up to the trust they have placed in me.

For the most part, I agree with what the member for Beaches—East York had to say. I thought it was interesting that the member specifically talked about cities. Being from Toronto, of course, the hon. member would know the importance of a city's agenda.

It took 12 years to get to the point where the federal Liberals finally acknowledged that one cannot have healthy regional, provincial and federal economies without having healthy local, municipal economies. They were finally ready to start putting some money there, many thanks to the NDP budget, Bill C-48, which actually flowed serious money into that agenda.

The member's interim leader said in the past that the Liberals would be absolutely opposed to anything the government did and that they would vote against it. If, through negotiation, we could actually get something in front of this House that advanced the cities' agenda in a serious way, would the Liberals step down from this petulant position and be prepared to vote and actually pass legislation that would help cities or will they just continue with their arms crossed, holding their breath, stamping their feet, saying they want to be back in government and that until that changes they are not prepared to do anything positive?

• (1620)

Hon. Maria Minna: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is being terribly unfair in his question.

First, the program for the cities was not something we were going to do. It was done. He is being totally unfair in trying to colourize this as us wanting another election. I do not want another election. I want to work.

With all due respect, I do not think the hon. member can tell me that the government actually has a child care plan on the table. If I see one I will support it absolutely. If the government members want to meet with me and negotiate one, I will meet with them. I have no problem with that at all. I am here to work and cooperate.

I want to ensure we deliver the best possible programs to citizens. I have no intention of going into another election. What I want is a full child care program and proper programs for people in this country. If the hon. member and the government are prepared to negotiate a plan, I will work with them.

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the Chair that I will be sharing my time with the member for Burlington.

It is a tremendous privilege to speak today in the House in response to the Speech from the Throne, the first for the new Conservative government. I am proud to be here in order to do so.

This is the first time I have had the opportunity to address the House with you in the chair, Mr. Speaker. Let me take the opportunity to congratulate you on your appointment as Deputy Speaker.

I would also like to once again thank the people of Calgary Northeast for giving me the tremendous privilege to once again represent them in this chamber. I would particularly like to thank the many volunteers who gave so much of their time to ensure my re-election.

I would also like to thank my family for their support over the years and especially during the last election. As many in this place will attest, this life can be quite taxing on families. However, we do it because we want to make a difference and we want to make our country better.

The Address

At this time I would like to take a moment to extend my condolences to the families, friends and co-workers of the four soldiers who lost their lives in Afghanistan this past weekend. Corporals Matthew Dinning and Randy Payne, Bombardier Myles Mansell and Lieutenant William Turner. We are all saddened by their loss, but their deaths will, however, not be in vain. They risked their lives to defend Canada's national interest, combat global terrorism and help the people of Afghanistan rebuild their country. We are grateful for their service and mourn their loss.

The Speech from the Throne focused on five priorities, priorities which were laid out to the Canadian public during the election and for which the Canadian public voted: accountability, lowering the GST, choice in child care, cracking down on crime and establishing a patient wait times guarantee. I might point out that all these priorities impact my constituents directly.

On accountability, I commend the government for moving swiftly and decisively in introducing the federal accountability act designed to make the federal government more accountable to Canadian taxpayers by providing them with open, accountable and honest government. This act will, among other things, reform the financing of political parties by banning corporate, union and large personal, political donations. It will toughen the Lobbyist Registration Act by extending the ban on lobbying activities to five years for former ministers, their aides and senior civil servants. I already had an opportunity to talk to some registered lobbyists about that point and they have expressed their agreement with it. They feel it will level the playing field.

On strengthening the power of the Auditor General, this is a key part of the accountability act and one which we have called for in opposition. Now we have the opportunity to make it happen by giving the Auditor General new powers to audit individuals and organizations that receive federal money. That includes crown corporations.

On cleaning up government appointments, contract polling and procurement, key to cleaning up government appointments is the commissioner who will lead the public appointments commission, which the Prime Minister recently announced will be headed by Mr. Gwyn Morgan, former president and CEO of EnCana. Mr. Morgan is known far and wide as a champion of accountability and ethics in the public and private sectors. He wrote the agenda for his own corporation in that area. This is a very significant appointment.

The federal accountability act will also provide real protection for whistleblowers. People need to know that when they see problems in government, they can speak up without fear of reprisal. We have seen that very recently. I want to give praise to Mr. Cutler for his courageous statement doing exactly that, showing the corruption that took place within the government. He stood up and was counted. It was a bold move and a courageous move. It usually comes with a price, but I commend him for it.

• (1625)

The government will give protection to people like Mr. Cutler by making the public sector integrity commissioner an agent of Parliament with the power to enforce the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act.

The federal accountability act will as well strengthen the access to information legislation to include seven crown corporations, seven agents of Parliament and three foundations created under the federal statutes.

These are the words of the Prime Minister:

These measures will change the way business is done in Ottawa forever. They will replace the culture of entitlement that took root under the previous government with a culture of accountability.

They are strong words, but I think they are very welcome by the electorate as it ponders what impact the act will have.

On the GST, my constituents along with many others in the country have long complained, and rightfully so, that they are overtaxed. The government agrees and that is why we have come up with a plan that will help reduce the tax burden on Canadian families. This will be done by cutting the GST from 7% to 6% and reduce it further to 5% within five years.

No matter what one's income, the GST is a tax which everyone pays and from which everyone will reap the benefit of reduction. The tax cut will be of particular benefit to those living on fixed incomes and those whose incomes are so low that they do not benefit from cuts to personal income tax. This group accounts for about 32% of Canadians.

Child care is an issue that sticks in the craw of the Liberals I know, but at least this is reality. This is an initiative that will be of particular benefit to many families in my riding who need child care. It will provide a choice. When it comes to child care, we on this side of the House feel the decision is best left to the parents. The one-size-fits-all approach does not work for all families. There are some families who rely on institutionalized day care for their children. Some choose to make more informal arrangements by using a neighbour or a friend to fulfill their day care needs, while there are some families who have made the decision to have one parent stay home to look after the children. As can be seen, the day care needs of families differ.

Under our plan, all Canadian families will be given a \$1,200 choice in child care allowance for each child under the age of six. This will be taxable in the hands of the parent with the lower income. In addition, the government has also earmarked \$250 million per year for incentives to encourage business, non-profit and community based organizations to create 125,000 new day care spaces in urban and rural communities across the country.

The next point is one that has always been an issue that has been near and dear to my heart, and that is the issue of criminal justice. For once, there is a clear statement from a government that is going to be serious about cracking down on crime. Dare we speak of the violence we see, unfortunately, in so many of our streets. Some of it is committed by gangs. We can just about name everything from murder, down to extortion and prostitution. I think Canadians have a right to feel safe in their own homes and in their own communities. They also have an expectation that those who commit serious criminal acts will be dealt with harshly by the courts.

The Address

What we have discussed, and the matter is now before the House and will be voted upon in the very near future, will be to bring tougher sentences against those violent or repeat offenders, especially for those committing crimes with guns, drive by shootings and so on. This is not the kind of Canada we want for our children.

• (1630)

I was going to speak on the wait times guarantee, but I know my colleagues have addressed that issue.

I support the Speech from the Throne and I hope all members in the House will do likewise.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the member's address to the Speech from the Throne and I noted what he had to say about child care. In an area where there are not enough child care spaces for the families who need them, I agree that it is good to have choice in child care, but there has to be real choice. Many families will benefit from a payment that seems to be in many ways the re-institution of the old family allowance program that was cut by a previous Conservative government.

However, to get down to having real choice in child care, there needs to be enough child care spaces for the families who need them. For the families where both parents must work to make ends meet, there need to be enough child care spaces. What does his government plan to do to create well funded, secure, stable child care spaces for Canada's children?

Mr. Art Hanger: Mr. Speaker, the member's question is a legitimate one, but I believe that she also knows the answer to at least part of her question. When it comes to the track record of the past governments, which have clearly stated all the moneys they have thrown in to creating child care spaces, just how many child care spaces were actually created. Maybe it is up for debate as to how many, but the fact that there are not the numbers that the Liberals have proclaimed is the issue. There is no doubt that the needs of the families vary. Those living in rural parts of our country will have a need for a different solution than in the urban areas. The bottom line is, with the present level of funding and programming, about 15% to 20% of parents actually use the program that exists to this day.

We want to expand that dramatically. We are going to offer, across the board, a choice for parents. If one parent chooses to stay home, that parent will be able to benefit somewhat from our program of \$1,200. Some parents may choose to take part in the 125,000 spaces that we intend to create by sitting down with industry, with employers, with the provinces and with communities. We are going to have a winning formula and many more people will benefit from it.

• (1635)

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a follow-up question for my hon. colleague across the way regarding child care. I listened to his response to the previous question, but I am curious to know what kind of timelines he would see for the development of these new spaces.

The province of Manitoba is looking at not having 1,600 new child care spaces in the city of Winnipeg, 700 new child care spaces in rural Manitoba and about 60 to 70 new child care spaces in the

northern part of the province. I am concerned about the plans of the member opposite and his colleagues. What kind of timelines would they see for the establishment of spaces to equate to what Manitoba hoped to offer in a very short period of time?

Mr. Art Hanger: Mr. Speaker, the government is preparing a budget that will deal with much of what the member's questions relate to. That will be presented in the House.

The member can be assured of one thing. For years the issue of child care, of dollars being spent wisely, of being distributed into the hands of parents and offering them choice has been debated in the House, and very little movement has been brought about by previous governments.

We want to broaden the field, by far, in allowing parents from all areas, both rural and urban, to benefit from the child care program. Unfortunately, in the past, so few parents really benefited broadly from the programs that were there. The member should wait for the budget.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, may I congratulate you on your appointment to the chair.

It is my honour to stand today and address the House in support of our government's Speech from the Throne, "Turning a New Leaf". On January 23 Canadians, including the constituents of my riding of Burlington, voted for change, not just change for the sake of change, but for a new approach and a new attitude to governing this great country from coast to coast to coast.

Canadians demanded integrity in their government. It was time to end the culture of entitlement and indifference. That is why the new Conservative government will restore accountability and ethics in Ottawa.

Canadians have placed their faith in a new government that has a sense of purpose. It was time to end the vast lists of unfulfilled commitments. That is why our new government is clear and precise in our priorities. Burlington voters wanted their new government to be proactive. It was time to end the litany of excuses for inaction. Our new government will deliver on our promises.

As the Conservative member of Parliament for the riding of Burlington, I am honoured to be part of this change, part of turning over a new leaf for Canada. This afternoon I would like to concentrate my remarks on the section of the throne speech that focuses on Canada's role in the world.

Our vision, and I believe the vision of all Canadians, is for a strong, united, independent and free Canada, a Canada that will live up to its tradition as a leader, a Canada that has credibility on the international stage, a Canada that has the respect of our friends and allies, and a Canada whose voice is supported by action.

The Speech from the Throne begins the process of rebuilding and restoring Canada's prominent and important role on the global stage. As the Governor General read on April 4:

—this government is committed to supporting Canada's core values of freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights around the world. In this regard, the Government will support a more robust diplomatic role for Canada, a stronger military and a more effective use of Canadian aid dollars.

The Address

Freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights are the core values of our troops and aid workers who are courageously and diligently working to bring opportunity, democracy and peace to the people of Afghanistan.

At this time I would like to offer my personal condolences to the families and friends of our recently fallen soldiers. Their brave and heroic commitment to our country and to the principles and values that guided their desire to serve will always be honoured. Their sacrifice will never be forgotten.

Standing up for Canadian values, being confident and decisive in our actions, defending the security of our citizens and protecting our national sovereignty have never been easy and rarely without sacrifice. Our veterans brought honour, respect and integrity to our country. Their sacrifice helped define us as a nation. Their brave actions liberated many from unspeakable oppression.

In Burlington on April 22 the Dutch community celebrated the relationship between Canada and the Netherlands. Much of the celebrations centred on the role our Canadian troops played in liberating the people of the Netherlands during World War II. It was my honour to represent our government and to participate in this important annual celebration of freedom.

Today the men and women who proudly don our country's uniform carry these Canadian values and traditions. All Canadians are proud, honoured and grateful for the service and sacrifice of all the men and women of our armed forces, past, present and future.

Our government is committed to a robust diplomatic role for Canada. We clearly understand that we are not alone in the world. We must work to rebuild our reputation as a reliable and respected international partner, a partner that is not afraid to lead and be decisive on the big issues in the international arena.

• (1640)

Our government will work through diplomatic means to bring freedom and democracy to other parts of the globe. Canada will participate with the international community at the United Nations to foster peace and prosperity for all people who subscribe to the Canadian values of freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

Closer to home the throne speech makes a commitment to building a stronger relationship with the United States. The throne speech states:

The Government will work cooperatively with our friends and allies and constructively with the international community to advance common values and interests. In support of this goal, it will build stronger multilateral and bilateral relationships, starting with Canada's relationship with the United States, our best friend and largest trading partner.

The relationship with our closest neighbour has frankly been strained over the past decade. A number of the issues from trade disputes to border security have been poorly managed and new issues are emerging that can and will affect the lives of many Canadians. It is time that we restored the respectful, professional and businesslike relationship with the United States. The throne speech clearly supports this objective.

The quality of the relationship we have with the United States has a direct impact on all parts of Canada. I want to illustrate its impact on my constituency of Burlington.

Burlington is situated between Canada's leading steel manufacturers, Dofasco and Stelco in Hamilton, and Ford Canada in Oakville. My community is home to thousands of workers who make their livelihoods from these leading companies that represent the foundation of Canada's manufacturing economy.

Burlington is also home to a large number of small and medium size businesses that are either suppliers or customers in these vital manufacturing sectors. The relationship that Canada has with the United States is key to the long term growth of these industries and businesses. Our neighbours to the south can either be our best customer or our toughest competitor. The decision is ours.

As a Great Lakes city, Burlington also has a vested interest in the relationship with the United States not only as it relates to trade, but also to the environment. Our shared fresh water resource represents a vital link between our two nations. A respectful, professional and businesslike relationship with the U.S. is what my constituents are demanding from our government. A good relationship with our neighbour is fundamental to Burlington's and Canada's health and prosperity.

I am proud of our government's commitment to rebuilding our mutually beneficial partnership. From my experience as a municipal councillor, I have learned that good neighbours make strong communities. As a good neighbour to the United States, both countries will be stronger.

Finally, "Turning a New Leaf" is about our government's commitment to leadership.

There is leadership in restoring accountability to our federal institutions. The new accountability act will deliver a government of integrity and higher ethical standards.

There is leadership in supporting families. Our family support program will provide direct financial assistance to families regardless of where they live in Canada. Our program is universal and fair to all families with preschool children.

There is leadership on delivering tax relief for all Canadians. Lowering the GST to 6% will have a direct and immediate impact on all taxpayers in the country. It is time to lower taxes.

There is leadership in tackling safety on our streets. Increasing the minimum sentences for violent repeat offenders is long overdue. We need to keep drug dealers out of our neighbourhoods and more police officers on our streets.

There is leadership in delivering health care. Working with our provincial partners we must find a solution to the long wait times that have plagued our health system. That begins with our wait times guarantee.

On January 23 Canadians voted for change. Our government will deliver that change. Our government will deliver leadership. Our government will deliver. It is time to turn a new leaf.

The Address

•(1645)

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to extend my congratulations to the hon. member for Burlington. I have known him for a number of years. In his former capacity as a Burlington city councillor and with my background as a Hamilton city councillor, our paths have crossed many times. I acknowledge that his predecessor has left big shoes to fill. She was well known as someone who fought for her riding and took care of her constituents, but I am sure the member is up to that challenge. I look forward to working with him in a non-partisan way and wish him all the best in this place. I am sure he has much to contribute.

My question to him is very similar to the one I asked the member on the other side of the House. It has to do with the cities agenda. The member was good enough to mention my hometown of Hamilton. Burlington is now our closest neighbour given the new boundaries of the City of Hamilton. Obviously a lot of what happens in the community of Burlington affects what happens in Hamilton and vice versa. Our futures are very much linked in terms of economic strength. He would certainly know better than I the challenges that exist in Burlington in terms of infrastructure and public transit, the very things that are crucial to the success of my hometown of Hamilton.

As he is a new member I do not expect him to stand up and spout off a list of things that he has done, but I would like to hear in his own words his commitment to ensuring that he will do everything he can along with those of us in the opposition parties to get the investments we need in our cities so that we can turn around the economic issues and the quality of life issues. Getting our local economy going is an absolute priority in my riding of Hamilton Centre given the poverty numbers that unfortunately exist.

I wonder if he would be kind enough to give the people in Hamilton the kind of assurances we would like to hear that the cities agenda and infrastructure and public transit will be a priority for him. Will he do everything he can from inside the government to effect change so that hopefully we can move forward on this file?

Mr. Mike Wallace: Mr. Speaker, my colleague and I have been friends and political acquaintances for a number of years. He also does a great job of representing his riding. He has done a great job both provincially and municipally. If he keeps moving up, I think he will be king eventually.

I understand the issues. In my speech I talked about being good neighbours with our friends in the United States. We also must be good neighbours with our friends in Hamilton as we do share a number of economic issues and infrastructure issues, such as the harbour, roads and transit.

As an individual coming from the municipal world I have a good understanding of the infrastructure needs and demands of the urban area which I represent and parts of the GTA. I made a commitment to my constituents to bring those needs and desires to caucus and to the House so that other members without these experiences will understand what we need to keep our economy moving. Infrastructure is the basis for economic development and economic growth which adds wealth to this country. It also will enable us to provide the social services that we are so proud of in my community.

I can assure the member that I will be a voice in caucus on these issues. As I said during the campaign, I will bring forward the ideas and the infrastructure needs of our urban communities.

•(1650)

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to share my time today with my colleague from Hamilton Mountain.

This, my inaugural speech in the House of Commons, begins on a very sad note. Four Canadian soldiers were killed in Afghanistan this past weekend, one of whom, Bombardier Myles Mansell, was born, raised and stationed in my riding, in Victoria. I wish to extend my deepest sympathy to his family and to assure them that their fellow Victorians share in their mourning.

I am very proud to speak today as the new member representing the people of Victoria. I would like to thank them for placing their confidence in me to bring their voice to Parliament. Their needs will inform my work and their priorities will be at the forefront of my efforts in Ottawa.

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge my predecessor, David Anderson, for his hard work on issues like Kyoto, west coast fisheries and offshore drilling, and the understanding he brought to those issues.

Victoria is an eclectic, diverse region. There are parks and natural forests that surround the city with a greenbelt, providing recreational opportunities and important habitats. There are heritage buildings that we have protected through tax incentive programs for which we have won international awards.

I am honoured to represent a population that is itself representative of Canada's cultural mosaic, with vibrant Chinese, Sikh, aboriginal and other cultural communities that enrich our common experience.

[*Translation*]

As a francophone living outside Quebec, I am proud that Victoria, the westernmost city in Canada, continues to honour my French and English heritage. My daily recognition of the presence of these two cultures in our country is one of the reasons I ran in the federal election. I wanted to remind everyone that francophones and anglophones can work together from coast to coast in a united Canada, within a renewed and more flexible federalism, and that both cultures will be the better for it.

[*English*]

As a former city councillor, I was proud to contribute to the progress and preservation of what makes Victoria unique. I worked to bring about a large mixed-use project called Dockside Green, which has the highest green standards in North America and net zero greenhouse gas emissions.

This project showcases all that can be accomplished when political will is used to expand rather than limit the range of possibilities, so I will not be deterred by the seemingly flippant use of the word "impossible" by the government when it comes to our environment, because I realize how crucially important it is to have the support and the leadership of the federal government for these progressive programs and projects.

The Address

During the recent federal campaign, the concerns of Victorians were brought home to me at every doorstep, as were the expectations they have for the government.

They expect their national government to once again work to ensure that all Canadians have a home. The recent throne speech fails to mention any support for affordable housing. In my community, many residents spend upwards of 40% of their income on housing and others are homeless. The housing crisis we face grew under the federal Liberals and it is incumbent on the new government to restore a viable national housing strategy.

My constituents expect a child care program that addresses two key concerns for parents: cost and availability. The Prime Minister's answer does little to address the former and nothing for the latter. Typically, day care in Victoria costs between \$30 and \$35 a day. The PM offers a maximum of \$4 to \$5 a day. Where does a single parent family working on minimum income find the rest?

My constituents also expect ongoing adequate investment in post-secondary education and skills training. It is well trained, well educated people who will create new opportunities and fuel our prosperity. The University of Victoria and Camosun College, like hundreds of others across Canada, were overlooked by the government in the throne speech.

• (1655)

[*Translation*]

As the post-secondary education critic and as a teacher and parent, I am very disappointed by this omission. This government would allow high tuition fees to hinder access to training.

[*English*]

Education is critical to a just and prosperous future. The C.D. Howe Institute admits that Canada continues to under-invest in education, when research shows that functional literacy has three times the impact on productivity and GDP than capital investment. Forty-two per cent of Canadian adults have a functional literacy level that is inadequate by international standards.

Finally, Victorians expect their national leaders to implement a real plan to tackle climate change. Eight out of ten Canadians want action now, but yet the Prime Minister concedes defeat on achieving the most basic Kyoto reductions before he even tries.

On Earth Day in Victoria last Saturday, hundreds of young people and their families gathered. They were angry at the Conservatives' lack of urgency in responding to climate change. They want a future with clean water, clean air and a healthy environment in a country that has moved from a polluting economy to a sustainable one. As their elected representatives, it is our opportunity and our obligation to make that future real.

Listening to my first throne speech from this Conservative government, I waited to hear something of substance for the citizens of Victoria: concrete proposals for affordable housing, effective programs to tackle climate change, and post-secondary education programs. I heard no such commitments. I hope the government will consider that these issues, if not addressed, will fundamentally impact the Canadian way of life much more than a 1% reduction of GST.

As MPs, we are leaders from whom Canadians expect political courage and decisive action on substantive and long term issues. The people of Victoria expect and deserve no less.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the words of my colleague from British Columbia. She has shown that there are many ways we can work in the House. We can be cooperative or confrontational; anglophones and francophones can work together; even Conservatives and New Democrats can work together. Mr. Broadbent once said in the House that while 80% of the subjects we address unite us, we often get stuck on the 20% that divide us.

The Speech from the Throne is not a shopping list. The government will consider the issues as the work of Parliament progresses. One thing is certain: to work together in this House, we must all share the vision that I share with my colleague: open federalism. That is why I, too, am here.

I also want to reassure my colleague about some issues such as the fight against climate change. Unlike the previous government—which talked a lot but failed to act on the advice of environmental experts, as we can see from its pathetic 13 year record—we plan to take concrete action. I would like her to tell us about the concrete actions she envisions with respect to climate change.

• (1700)

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. I find his words reassuring, particularly in regard to climate change and also to the importance of post-secondary education and technical training and to housing. These are all very important issues in my riding.

In regard to climate change, the NDP has proposed a very solid plan that would enable us to achieve the Kyoto objectives without difficulty within 25 years. It would give us a moderate transition plan that treats industry with care.

What had my constituents in Victoria concerned was the fact that the Conservative government seems ready to drop any reference to Kyoto without providing a plan for the direction that it wants to take. However, I find it reassuring to know that there is political will. We want to work together with the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party and our colleagues in the Bloc Québécois in order to meet the needs of Canadians.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the new member for Victoria on her speech. It was delivered very well and she spoke very directly about the British Columbian francophonie.

The Address

As we know, British Columbia now has the fourth largest francophone presence in Canada, after Quebec, the Acadians, and Franco-Ontarians.

There is a thriving, very vibrant culture in British Columbia. People speak French with Quebec and Acadian accents, of course, but also with the accents of Africa, Southeast Asia, China and other places.

I congratulate the member on her comments.

[English]

My question is related to the environment, because what she raised, very importantly, is the fact that we are seeing in British Columbia environmental degradation, with increasing smog days and more people spending time in hospitals as a result of the fact that our environment is deteriorating. The Liberals did nothing. The Conservatives, as she mentions, have not directly tied into Kyoto an environmental plan. I would like to ask the member what she believes the implications are if the Conservative government acts as the Liberals did and ignores the environment.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Indeed, Mr. Speaker, the question of climate change is a very serious one that affects the future of our children, the future of my children, my grandchildren and those of everyone else here. I believe the results of doing nothing will be very tragic for all of us. I can only hope that we will have the political courage to act now.

• (1705)

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as today is the first time I have had the chance to stand in the House, I would be remiss if I did not take a moment to reflect on the privileged opportunity that the voters of Hamilton Mountain are affording me.

As I look around this Chamber I am deeply mindful of those who have gone before us. To think about the profound impact that the greatest Canadian, Tommy Douglas, made on the lives of working families from this very institution is to be both inspired and humbled by the opportunities that Parliament represents. I cannot and will not take that responsibility lightly.

While many of our campaigns were fiercely partisan, our work here must be aimed at improving the lives of all working families. In the last election, voters expressed a desire for change. They elected a new government but they wanted to temper its power by also electing enough New Democrats to balance that change. The resulting minority Parliament represents a great opportunity to enact the constructive change that Canadians wanted. By working together, members on all side of the House can enact the positive changes that will strengthen both our communities and our country.

To that end, let me contribute to that dialogue by offering some suggestions that I hope the government will deem helpful as it begins to navigate its way through its mandate.

I was encouraged by the fact that the throne speech addressed some of our party's priorities. It was clear to all of us in the election that Canadians were tired of the culture of entitlement that was and is the Liberals' legacy. They are looking to us now to bring integrity and respect back to the political process.

I applaud the government's first steps in promising action with respect to greater accountability but I hope that it will not stop short of banning floor crossing outright. Nothing incenses voters more than seeing politicians put self-interest ahead of their sacred trust with constituents who elected them to office in good faith.

Similarly, Canadians are tired of broken promises and are understandably suspicious of empty government rhetoric. After 12 years of broken Liberal promises it is hard to blame them. Canadians want and deserve concrete action.

In taking on my new responsibilities here in the House, I was absolutely stunned to discover how callously the Liberals manipulated working families for their own political gain. In the lead up to the last election, workers in Hamilton watched closely as a bill made its way through the House that purported to move workers up the list of creditors in cases where companies went bankrupt. We did not get everything we wanted but at least workers' wages were finally being protected, or so we thought.

Imagine my surprise, upon taking up my duties here, to learn that, despite the fact that the bill had passed all three readings in the House and despite the fact that it had received royal assent, the Liberals did not proclaim into law those clauses of the bill that explicitly offered wage protection to workers in cases of bankruptcy. In fact, those were the only substantive clauses that the Liberal government did not proclaim into law before heading to the polls. Of course no one knew about it because proclamations are usually a matter of routine immediately following a bills passage.

Not even I would ever have suspected that the Liberals would stoop so low as to take public credit for standing up for working families when they had no intention of ever walking the walk. Their behaviour is absolutely disgraceful and before the Liberals stand up in the House and lecture others about integrity and accountability, I would encourage them to offer an unequivocal apology to working families in this country, but of course they will not.

As Bob Mackenzie, my mentor and Ontario's former minister of labour, used to say, "The Liberals are so deep in the pockets of big business that they're going to choke on the lint in that pocket".

Working families deserve better, which is why our caucus is committed to advancing the working families first agenda. I was delighted to see that even the Conservative throne speech referred to working families as well. I am hopeful that the Conservatives will not fall into the Liberal trap of only talking the talk without walking the walk.

We are confronted by a unique opportunity where the government can do the right thing and demonstrate that it is serious about parliamentary accountability. Parliament has already expressed its views about the protection of workers' wages in cases of bankruptcies and it is incumbent upon the government to act on that resolution.

The Address

• (1710)

In my riding of Hamilton Mountain this issue is a top of mind priority for hundreds of working families. When Stelco entered CCAA protection, it became apparent to employees in all workplaces in our community that the security of their earned wages and pensions was in jeopardy.

We have the opportunity to do the right thing. I have already committed to workers that I will be introducing a bill to provide effective pension protection. I call upon the government to proclaim the remaining sections of the wage earner protection program act. Together, we can show Canadians that we are serious about ending the sleight of hand conduct that became the hallmark of the Liberal administration over the last 12 years.

The same is true of child care. The Liberals promised a national child care program in 1993 but for 12 years that promise was not kept. It is the will of Canadians and the majority in the House to build a truly national child care program at last. I want to work with the government to build upon the current child care agreements so that we can achieve more for child care in the next 12 months than the previous government did in 12 years.

We need ongoing stable funding for a publicly operated child care program. My colleagues and I remain absolutely committed to ensuring that quality, affordable, not for profit child care spaces will be built, not just in Hamilton but right across this country. Children deserve educational excellence right from the early years.

In my home town of Hamilton, one in five people live in poverty and 25% of those are children. We know that children are not poor. It is their parents who are poor. Hamilton families need help now. We need to invest in our manufacturing sector to ensure that we will continue to have decent paying jobs in our community. We need to provide training and retraining opportunities so that we can develop and maintain the skilled workforce that is essential to supporting the 21st century economy. We need to get serious about access to professions and trades for foreign trained workers. Our economy and our communities depend on it.

We need to support our municipalities with money for infrastructure renewal and housing so that cities like Hamilton can provide residents with the services they deserve and offer some much needed property tax relief.

We need to get serious about living up to our commitments under the Kyoto accord. With the environment so integrally linked to the health of Canadians, we cannot afford to wait to green our economy. The time to act is now.

We also need to ensure that seniors can retire with the dignity and respect they deserve. In Hamilton, seniors live in poverty at twice the rate of the national average. They have worked hard all their lives, played by the rules and still cannot make ends meet. The throne speech talks about addressing seniors' needs but does not even offer one specific initiative to offer seniors hope.

We need to ensure that CPP, OAS and the GIS afford our seniors the opportunity to retire with dignity and in relative financial security. We need to protect the very institutions that their hard-earned tax dollars built: health care, home care and long term care.

For years our seniors contributed to building the best health care system in the world, only to watch that system crumble precisely at the time when they need it the most. Seniors deserve better and they need our help now.

The government's throne speech affords opportunities for hope but unless the Conservatives are willing to engage in constructive dialogue about flushing out the rhetoric of their agenda, Canadians will be no better off than they were after 12 years of Liberal rule.

History has taught us that we can accomplish amazing things in minority parliaments. It is how we got old age pensions, public health care and national housing programs, but they work best when there is consultation, cooperation and compromise.

I am prepared to do my part to make this Parliament work and I look forward to working with other members in good faith. As Tommy Douglas would remind us, it is not too late to make a better world.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate my colleague, the member for Hamilton Mountain, on her speech. I note that she expressed concern about how the throne speech will affect workers and about the whole issue of social justice. The Conservative Party is very concerned about criminal justice. That is its choice, and it was elected in part for its stand on that issue. But it is disquieting to see that the Conservative government's throne speech has little to say about social justice.

The hon. member also mentioned that poverty is increasing and is affecting children. Logically, when children are poor, it is because their parents are poor.

Before I ask my question, I would like to say that according to the Canadian Federation of Food Banks, last year more than 885,000 people in Canada—more than the population of Ottawa—visited food banks. This figure includes 250,000 children, more than the population of three ridings.

I would like to ask my colleague, who is concerned about this issue, how she feels about the fact that the throne speech makes no mention of it.

The Address

•(1715)

[English]

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right. As I tried to indicate in my reply to the throne speech, the agenda of the Conservative government does very little to address the real issues that working families in Canada must face every day, which is one of the reasons that my colleague who is sitting here today talks about child care all the time. We need to ensure that children get an excellent start early on in their lives and that we stop considering child care to be babysitting but rather that child care is deemed as an integral part of our early childhood education system.

For those of us from Hamilton, my colleague from Hamilton Centre is here today, we have been fighting for a very long time to ensure our manufacturing sector gets the support it needs so people have decent paying jobs. In Hamilton the steel sector is first and foremost on our minds as we listen to the Conservative government's throne speech and its absolute silence on a steel strategy or an auto strategy. I look forward to working with the member across the way on some of those issues.

[Translation]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I believe my hon. colleague is saying that she wants to make this government work. As parliamentarians, we all share this responsibility toward Canadians. The Speech from the Throne supports this goal.

Our colleague talked about what we must not do: play games with each other. We must establish trust not only between Canadians, but also between parliamentarians. Earlier, a member brought up an example of the previous government's actions. It did not respect its commitment to the opposition.

That is why we have tabled the accountability bill. We want to restore Canadians' faith in their institutions.

My colleague said that the manufacturing sector needs support. Last week, I was in Lévis. Representatives of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business told me how well the measures we have taken to help businesses are meeting their needs and stimulating growth.

With respect to families, the \$1,200 allowance will also be distributed to families with parents who work at night or stay home. A parent's love is surely the best way to raise a child. I would like to know whether my colleague agrees that this measure demonstrates the government's support for families.

[English]

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to say that I do find common ground with the member of the government in that we both believe that the last 12 years were ones of broken promises. Therefore I am delighted to at least start this part of my participation in Parliament in a conciliatory way.

Having said that and because nothing is ever unequivocal in this place, I do believe that the love of parents is absolutely important in the development of children but there is a reason why most Canadians do not home school their children. It is because the educational system offers excellence that we cannot provide at

home. Let us be clear that child care is part of an early childhood education system. It is not a babysitting service. It is not in lieu of parenting. It is something that we absolutely must provide to give kids the best start in life.

I am sorry but on that we will not agree but let us chat some more about 12 years of broken Liberal promises.

•(1720)

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Nipissing—Timiskaming.

First and foremost, I would like to thank the people of Thornhill for the trust and vote of confidence they have given to me again. It is an honour and a privilege to continue to serve as the member of Parliament for Thornhill, a vibrant riding that is very diverse in nature.

I listened to the throne speech, thought about the impact this statement of the government's intentions would have on the residents in my riding, and became increasingly concerned. When we need to be reaching out to include more people in our prosperity, the direction the new government is set upon seems to have missed the mark.

Based on what was outlined in the Speech from the Throne, it seems that the government can see the future only through the thin haze of its five point strategy. For so many of our citizens and our businesses, there was simply no mention.

Canada needs a forward-looking plan that takes action, not one that only focuses on five priorities and does not offer either a national or a global vision for our continued future prosperity. There is no commitment to our cities, our communities, our seniors, our caregivers, our environment and, what is very important, our future generations.

There is absolutely no mention in the throne speech of continued investments in infrastructure or transit for our cities. Cities and communities are the economic engines that drive our economy forward and it is absolutely imperative that the federal government continue to partner with them on key investments in defined priority areas. Our municipalities play a critical and far-reaching role in the economic vitality and quality of life of Canadians.

The throne speech is limited in vision and reflects the minimalist goals of the government. With emerging economies in India and China rapidly taking their places as global economic giants, Canada must stay ahead of the curve and plan the contours of that future now. Investments in our infrastructure and our transportation systems, incentives to stimulate innovation and the proper support of our knowledge-based economy must be paramount to this plan.

I cannot understand how the government can ignore infrastructure, because more than ever we are living in a time that demands this recognition and a proper plan for the potential that lies ahead. This lack of recognition does not bode well for the new deal for cities and the continued and necessary investment in our municipalities. This comes at a time, in fact, when provinces such as Ontario, B.C. and Quebec are committing greatly to the needed investment in cities and infrastructure initiatives.

The Address

Instead of continuing to build and leverage further investments for the benefit of our future growth, productivity and prosperity, the throne speech was singularly silent on this issue. What does the future hold for our cities and communities if they are not properly supported? How will the economic engine turn? Where will trading partners turn to get the products they need and get their products to market? It is not even enough to ensure that the gas tax revenue flows to municipalities in the next four years; it needs to flow consistently for the long term.

It is not only about the gas tax commitment. The new deal gave municipalities a seat at the table for the first time. It paved the way for a new era of intergovernmental cooperation and partnership while still respecting the jurisdictional areas.

The provinces are making the necessary transportation and infrastructure investments. Specifically in my area, Viva rapid transit and the Province of Ontario have announced the expansion of the Spadina subway line north into the city of Vaughan. I support this expansion and Viva rapid transit and wonder how long the province will have to wait to see if the federal government will step up to the plate. We cannot afford any uncertainty or delay, because it will not encourage the sustainable growth, effective transportation systems and healthy, prosperous and vibrant cities and communities that we all need.

Living within our cities and communities are our future leaders of tomorrow. They are the citizens that will keep Canada at the forefront in the 21st century, but this too will require furthering our investments in people, our greatest resource. It will involve a commitment to skills training and to supporting continuous education. It will involve making post-secondary education a top priority, and importantly, it will involve giving our youngest citizens the very best possible start in life.

Canadians believe in and have embarked on establishing a truly national, accessible and affordable early learning and child care system. This is not babysitting, I agree. This is an opportunity for all children to grow so that every child can come to the school system ready to learn and ready to be successful. These agreements signed with the provinces reflect the core Liberal belief that we have a responsibility to invest in our children.

However, the government has chosen to rip up these deals in favour of what? A nominal \$100 a month taxable allowance to parents, in the name of choice. I too believe in choice, but for the majority of Canadian families this allowance does not offer any choice, and no matter how many times the government says it does, it still is not true.

It is important that we support our families, but providing a meagre taxable allowance and calling it a child care program is a cruel trick to play. I do not believe that people will be misled by this. With over 75% of both parents working outside the home, they badly need child care spaces, period. Repeated studies have shown the benefits of such a program: that it is in fact in everyone's interest to invest in our children, that it is our future.

• (1725)

The government claims to have a plan. The truth is that it is a non-plan. There is no plan. A cash allowance to support families with

children, while certainly welcome, is an inadequate response to a very real current need for child care in Canada.

Support for our future leaders must flow from their years as children to their young adult life. Support needs to be invested in post-secondary education and skills training. However, there again is a disconnect on this issue, incredibly, as the words "post-secondary education" were not even mentioned in the throne speech.

We need a continuum of education from early childhood to young adult life, through the middle years and beyond. This is the key to building a healthy, educated population that is enabled to reach its potential and in fact our country's potential.

The only way to ensure that Canada succeeds in the 21st century knowledge based economy is to invest in our people. Providing a mere tax credit for books is not enough for the thousands of young people who struggle under enormous debt. We need to provide the opportunities and a variety of incentives for all our youth and every person who seems to and wants to pursue higher education and additional skills training.

Students across the country are bewildered. They are wondering how post-secondary education fell off the radar screen so quickly and so unilaterally. To ignore this pivotal area is merely short-sighted. By shortchanging our young people, we are shortchanging our future capacity as a country and to be the world's best.

In striving to be the world's best we have to continue creating a climate of opportunity, a climate where the skills immigrants bring to this country are fully honoured and utilized. We must help new Canadians integrate into the job market quickly so they can add to and benefit from this country's prosperity. We need to unleash their talents and potential that currently exist and ensure that their hopes and dreams are fulfilled and realized. Canada can and must deliver in this area. It is very important.

On the international stage, Canada is a nation the world has looked to for leadership on many counts. We are a nation that has always stood up against hate, bigotry, racism, anti-Semitism and intolerance. We introduced Canada's first ever national action plan to combat racism and Canadians rightly want to know how this government will continue moving Canada forward to combat hate and intolerance.

Moving Canada forward also means playing a strong role on the world stage. The government says it will sharpen Canada's foreign policy. The throne speech states that "the Government will support a more robust diplomatic role for Canada...". What exactly does that mean? And how does the tragic situation in Darfur factor into this sentiment?

As we know, the conflict in Darfur has resulted in the deaths of more than 400,000 people. Over 2 million Sudanese have been displaced from their homes, including more than 200,000 who have had to flee to nearby Chad. There are unspeakable horrors occurring every day as we speak.

The Address

As a result of my own deep concern and the concern of many of my constituents, I have joined forces with other colleagues from all sides of this House to spearhead an aggressive action plan to stop these atrocities. Canada must take the lead. With members of the government active in this parliamentary coalition, I hope that the Prime Minister will not only listen but will take action on the recommendations put forward to stop this genocide.

It is precisely this kind of collective understanding and team effort that need to be put forward to meet our Kyoto commitments as well. We cannot ignore the science. We know that combating climate change and honouring our commitments are high priorities for Canadians out there; however, to date the government has conceded defeat without even trying. The government is disregarding outright the concerns of many Canadians and has moved unilaterally to cut numerous important educational environmental programs.

There is a grave concern out there in many quarters about the detrimental impact this will have on our environment and our ability to meet our Kyoto commitments. The time has come for the government to be honest and upfront about its true intentions. Canadians need and deserve to know. We have a lot at stake. A closed door policy is not increasing the transparency that the Conservatives say they want to increase.

I would suggest that there is a pattern emerging. It is a pattern of inconsistency that is troubling. Canadians know that this government inherited one of the healthiest economies in memory, one in which serious investments in social and economic programs for Canada's continued prosperity are very doable, possible and necessary. With so much hope and progress on the horizon, it is very disheartening that the government has lowered the bar with a throne speech that in fact does very little for the average Canadian.

But the world does not stand still. After the tremendous growth, the many achievements, our model of intercultural harmony and the sound fiscal management that we have experienced, Canada cannot afford to be just a fulcrum. We must keep moving forward with hope, optimism and ambition. Disconnects will only erode what we have achieved and diminish our capacity on all fronts. We need to be planning and setting up the needed infrastructure and systems to provide a foundation for another decade of prosperity to be realized.

I look forward to the discussions and debates in this great House on how we can together best achieve this goal.

• (1730)

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I very much share much the hon. member's concerns over the omission relating to post-secondary education and training. We all know that education fees have gone up. In my province, they have gone up by more than 30% in a few years.

I am wondering how the member can explain the 12 years of the Liberal Party's inaction in that respect, first by putting education under some obscure transfer where it was absolutely impossible to estimate or even guess how much money was actually going to education and also in having the then Liberal prime minister say that he recognized the need for a dedicated transfer but never, never acting on it.

I am wondering how she can express such dismay over the omission and yet justify her own party's inaction over 12 years. The Conservatives have had only two months to be inactive.

Mrs. Susan Kadis: Mr. Speaker, this is a high priority area for me and hopefully for our whole country, I am sure. As members may recall, we did have the initiative to give partial funding, direct funding, to our students, something that had not taken place previously. It was a groundbreaking initiative.

Unfortunately, due to the member's party itself supporting the Conservative Party and the Bloc, we went to an earlier election and this is one of the things that was left by the wayside. It was very disappointing, because it held great promise for our students.

So with respect, those members really cannot say one thing and do another. Again, talking about walking the talk, I think this is one of the areas that really was a sacrifice from that early election call.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend my colleague for her speech and also her accurate answer to the question that was just posed. The whole issue of education in Canada surely has to be one of the top five priorities for all Canadians, certainly for Canadian families.

In post-secondary education we have made a lot of strides, as she knows. The hon. member was a member of our caucus on post-secondary education. Canada has become a leader in the world and the leader in the G-7 in terms of publicly funded research.

Last year, we had an opportunity in the economic update presented in this House to bring in sweeping new improvements for student finance to address the issue of access, especially for those Canadians most in need: aboriginal Canadians, low income Canadians, and persons with disabilities. We did not have a chance to pass that in this House. We would have if the New Democratic Party had supported it. It would now be in place, helping students. Also, in the election campaign, we came out with the fifty-fifty plan to help all Canadians.

I wonder if my hon. colleague might give us her thoughts as to how optimistic she might be about this government following through on those sweeping improvements in light of the fact that education was not mentioned in the Speech from the Throne.

Mrs. Susan Kadis: Mr. Speaker, I agree wholeheartedly. In fact, I appreciate the member's leadership on this issue.

The Address

I have major concerns about the fact that education is not even mentioned in the throne speech. It is actually unfathomable in this particular time, day and age not to hear a country such as Canada say very clearly that it is going to invest significantly in this area, with the other jurisdictions. It is actually unheard of and it is very worrisome, because again, our youth are looking to us to see that we understand. They are waiting to see what the government will come forward with. I know that right now our youth are greatly concerned that we are taking a step backward. Again, this is something that, like a child care system, is in everyone's interest. To not understand that is to really have one's head in the sand.

Again, it is great to have a focus, but we cannot forget about so many people and their interests and the potential positive impact this has for all of our lives in our Canadian society.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to come back to the whole issue of the Liberals' record on post-secondary education, because my recollection of the last Parliament was that the Liberals' sole measure for students was for dead students: that a student had to be dead and then he or she might get loan forgiveness. That was the only measure, the only initiative, the Liberals took in that last Parliament.

I do not know how the member can get up and criticize this new government for taking no action when that was the only measure the Liberals could come up with in their time in power. I wonder if the member could comment on that.

• (1735)

Mrs. Susan Kadis: Mr. Speaker, I am in a quandary myself, wondering why the member's party continues to support a government that is going completely in the opposite direction. The government is deviating entirely from the member's most important so-called principles. I fail to understand how the member could compromise that of which he speaks about so fervently. I fail to understand how the member could say one thing and do another. I guess there is a consistency here. It is happening with the government and it is happening with the NDP.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to take part in this debate and to air my views on the Speech from the Throne.

[*English*]

I would like to begin my remarks this afternoon by thanking the people of Nipissing—Timiskaming for their overwhelming support during the recent election campaign. It was a very long and many times challenging campaign; however, thanks to the outstanding efforts of countless volunteers I have the great honour and privilege of representing Nipissing—Timiskaming for a second term.

Since I was first elected to the House of Commons in 2004, I have consulted with literally thousands of constituents to discuss the issues that matter most to them. These issues include: productivity, the environment, aboriginal Canadians, education, agriculture, and infrastructure funding for cities and communities.

When the Prime Minister laid out his agenda for the 39th Parliament in the Speech from the Throne, he reiterated his five campaign promises, but he offered no comprehensive vision for the

future of Canada. What struck me most about the Speech from the Throne was not so much what was included in it but rather what was left out. None of the issues that I cited moments ago, as being priorities for my constituents, were addressed by the Conservative plan.

Canada, as most countries, faces complex and wide-ranging issues, both nationally and internationally. We need a government that is prepared to face these challenges head on, not ignore them for the sake of the Prime Minister's partisan desire to control the message. The hope, of course, is that by working cooperatively with the Liberals and the other opposition parties, the Conservatives will acknowledge the need to develop a truly national vision that reflects the priorities of all Canadians.

The Liberal opposition was recently successful in amending the throne speech to stop the Conservatives from raising taxes. We did this by including an amendment that recognized that the Conservative government inherited one of the strongest economies and by far the best fiscal position of all the G-7 countries. Therefore, there should be no reason for Conservatives to raise income taxes and reduce child care spaces to accommodate their GST cut and payments to parents.

We were also successful in including aboriginal Canadians, seniors, farm families and new Canadians, all of whom were left out of the Prime Minister's five point vision. These amendments illustrate how we can work cooperatively to ensure that the policies and actions of the government better reflect Canadian values. We must note however that there is still much work to be done.

Given that the Liberals have handed the Conservatives the strongest economy and best fiscal position in the G-7, why is the government not implementing the historic Kelowna accord which will raise the standards of living for Canada's first nations, Inuit and Métis people? Why is the government cancelling the child care funding agreements with the provinces? Why is it reneging on Canada's Kyoto commitments to deal with climate change and the environmental degradation to Canada's air, land and water? Why is the government rolling back investment in research and development that would help Canada better compete in the 21st century's knowledge-based global economy? Why is the government ignoring the infrastructure and environmental needs of Canada's cities and communities?

As the member of Parliament for Nipissing—Timiskaming, I must ensure that the needs of my constituents are being properly assessed. As the FedNor critic I also have a responsibility to make certain that the Conservative government remains committed to all of northern Ontario. Prior to the most recent election campaign, the current Prime Minister made countless comments making it very clear that he did not believe in the effectiveness of regional development programs such as FedNor and COMRIF, among others.

During the campaign itself however the Conservative leader had a sudden about-face on the issue and tried to assure voters that a Conservative government would in fact remain committed to regional development. He even went so far as to dismiss claims to the contrary as nothing more than Liberal propaganda.

The Address

Since then, the Prime Minister and his Conservative government have done very little to demonstrate their so-called commitment to regional development or the people of northern Ontario for that matter. This is just one of several promises that seem to have been conveniently shelved, forgotten or broken since the Conservatives assumed power.

When I was first elected as MP for Nipissing—Timiskaming, I made it clear to my constituents that my goal was to work with them in order to revitalize our economy, promote growth through job creation, and to do so within the context of a sound environmental framework. During the past session of Parliament, I worked very hard in partnership with community leaders, businesses, organizations and individuals throughout the riding to help realize these goals together.

• (1740)

To that end, I am very proud of what we were able to accomplish together. Northern Ontario benefited greatly from the previous Prime Minister's leadership and Nipissing—Timiskaming in particular benefited from the Liberal government's commitment to regional development.

My concern is that much of the successes we achieved under the previous government will now be lost or severely hindered under the current regime. Quite frankly, there is no good reason why we cannot build and maintain a strong, vibrant economy in my riding and throughout northern Ontario, and all of Canada for that matter. Whether it is domestic or international business, it can be done from anywhere in the world and that includes Nipissing—Timiskaming.

In this case, our ability to succeed depends largely on the federal government's ability to identify the priorities and meet the needs of the people who live and do business in northern Ontario. This begins with investment in infrastructure through programs such as COMRIF. COMRIF is a partnership between the Government of Canada and the government of Ontario, designed to help improve and renew public infrastructure in municipalities all across the province.

Last year, the Government of Canada and Ontario announced over \$249 million in projects funded under COMRIF intake one, including over \$16 million for municipalities throughout Nipissing—Timiskaming. At that time, the city of North Bay in my riding received the single largest COMRIF investment of \$15 million from each of the two levels of government toward a new water filtration plant.

This past week the minister responsible for FedNor released a list of infrastructure projects for COMRIF intake two. I was pleased to learn that two projects from Nipissing—Timiskaming received funding, but I was very disappointed that more applications from my riding and throughout northern Ontario were not even considered.

Without the necessary infrastructure investment in northern Ontario, building and sustaining a vibrant economy is made increasingly difficult. Add to this the rising cost of fuel, the ongoing softwood lumber dispute, inadequate funding for farmers and producers, and many other issues in northern Ontario communities, it is easy to understand why my constituents feel abandoned by the Conservative government.

In the weeks and months ahead, I intend to continue to work very hard alongside my caucus colleagues and members of other opposition parties to ensure that the people of northern Ontario are treated fairly. Furthermore, I also remain committed to working hand in hand with the people I represent to ensure that their needs are being put front and centre. They voted for integrity and determination, and I intend to deliver.

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the speech from my hard-working and dedicated colleague. He mentioned many issues important to Canadians which are not mentioned in the Speech from the Throne or are touched upon in a very scathing way only.

He mentioned in particular first nations. He talked about the bare mention or reference to our aboriginal Canadians, 1.3 million of them. Five months ago today the historic Kelowna accord was signed. My concern is that aboriginals across Canada are thinking yet again there will be another delay of another five months. Ideally, they would at least have received from the government a commitment to implement the Kelowna accord. Five months later that commitment is not there.

Bare reference has been made to aboriginal issues in the Speech from the Throne. I have heard about it in my riding. I am wondering if my hon. colleague has heard comments in his riding from his constituents about the inadequacy of the Speech from the Throne vis-à-vis our aboriginal brothers and sisters.

• (1745)

Mr. Anthony Rota: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's question is very pertinent and important because native issues are very important not only in my riding but in much of northern Ontario and northern Canada.

When we hear what was said about the Kelowna accord, there is one comment that comes to mind. I cannot think of who the member was from the Conservative Party but he or she said it was written on the back of a napkin and was kind of thrown together in one weekend. The grand chief from my region was there and worked for 18 months, that is just on his part, getting it together. A lot of work and discussion went into it to ensure that it served the needs of our native Canadians.

With one fell swoop, it was thrown aside. One of the great disappointments for all the natives in northern Ontario is that the Conservatives plan on disregarding and marginalizing them to the point where they will not have sufficient funding to go day to day in their operations. There was a good talk from the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development on how the government was going to take care of a lot of problems. Some of the problems that exist in northern Ontario are not being addressed by the government and I do not believe they will be addressed by the government.

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the Liberals talk about the current government's approach to native issues they so totally misrepresent what we stand for that I am really disappointed in it. It just does not serve the dignity of the House or the government of the country.

The Address

The fact is that no one has a monopoly on compassion and care for other people in our society. We in our party are very dedicated and committed to doing what is best for our first nations people in the long run. However that does not mean that we immediately jump into some deal that has been struck by the previous government. We are now the government and we will investigate. We will see what has been done, what needs to be done and we shall do it with the greatest dispatch. I really wish that members opposite would stop mischaracterizing our view on these issues.

Mr. Anthony Rota: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure what the question is but the question was on monopolizing compassion. I am not saying that anyone in this Parliament has any monopoly on compassion but one thing that I have seen from the other side is a complete lack or even understanding of compassion. It is all very much to the right wing and everyone stands up and does whatever he or she wants and to heck with our fellow neighbours.

What the hon. member on the other side lacks understanding on is compassion toward other people who are in this country with us.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about regional development because my colleague is the critic for FedNor and I am the critic for ACOA. It is very important in these parts of Canada that the Government of Canada play a role.

In my case, the minister for ACOA also happens to be the Minister of Foreign Affairs, a pretty busy portfolio. I believe that in his case the minister for FedNor happens to be the Minister of Health which is also a pretty busy portfolio. I think that shows a lack of respect. Nobody could really do both of those jobs and do them very effectively. Regional development in Atlantic Canada has played a very important role as I know it has in northern Ontario.

Could the member comment on how optimistic he is that it would continue?

Mr. Anthony Rota: Mr. Speaker, the words that keep coming back to me when I think of regional development are the words that came out of the Prime Minister when he was the opposition leader. I think the words he used were, "it breeds defeatism".

What happens is that certain areas of the country deserve to have certain infrastructure so they can compete on a level playing field. I think it is important that we allow that infrastructure to develop so that any business or group competing on a national level is not put behind the eight ball. One of the key things about regional economic development is allowing that to happen, otherwise if we just take a laissez-faire attitude we end up with a concentration of population in certain areas.

Maybe what they are thinking is that we have five major centres, which are the five cities, and everybody should crowd in. I do not think that is the right way to look at it and that is certainly not my view of Canada. My view of Canada is having people right across Canada, up into the north, into the south and to both sides, east and west, so we can all work together and develop the country to be all that it can be.

● (1750)

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington.

This is my first speech in the 39th Parliament. I am not exactly a stranger to the House and it seems just a few short 13 years ago that I showed up as a greenhorn MP, which is nothing compared to your longevity, Mr. Speaker.

I am really grateful for the opportunity to thank the people of the great riding of Cariboo—Prince George for the confidence and trust they have placed in me by giving me the great honour to represent them for a fifth consecutive term of office. I see some of my colleagues on the other side who arrived here in 1993 as well. I am still happy to see them here and am thrilled they are all on that side.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my tremendous staff who over the last 13 years have redefined the meaning of client service to an extent that the quality of our constituency service is unparalleled in Canada. I thank Barb, Jeanne, Walt, Shelley, Donna and Gloria from the bottom of my heart for all they do for the people of my riding and for all they do for me.

This weekend sadly we learned that four Canadian soldiers had made the ultimate sacrifice in Afghanistan. These men were working to bring security, democracy, self-sufficiency and prosperity to the Afghan people and to protect Canada's national and collective security. We will not forget their selfless contribution to Canada. I express on behalf of myself, my family and the people of the riding of Cariboo—Prince George our deepest condolences to the families, friends and co-workers of these four brave men. Our thoughts are certainly with them.

The work the Canadian military and CIDA do for Afghanistan is most significant. Canadians can be proud that we are delivering humanitarian assistance, demonstrating international leadership and defending our national interests in a most dangerous world.

Canada has significant strategic interests in a secure, self-sufficient and democratic Afghanistan. At the request of the Afghan government, this Conservative government led by our great Prime Minister has made a commitment to helping the Afghan people restore stability, reinforce governance and reduce poverty in that country.

This year Canada has allocated \$100 million for Afghanistan's development. The fact is that the security provided by the Canadian soldiers creates an atmosphere in which development can increasingly take place, and it does. It is so important for the world, for the Afghan people and of course for Canada's leadership on a global basis.

The Address

In March 2006 Canada announced new initiatives and renewed contributions to enhance security, address the drugs challenge, create economic opportunities and build confidence in government. These include: anti-personnel mine and ammunition stockpile destruction; disbandment of illegal armed groups; mine action national development budget; counter narcotics integrated alternative; livelihoods programs in Kandahar; counter narcotics trust fund; vocational training and food aid for war widows; national solidarity program; national area based development program; and Afghanistan reconstruction trust fund. Those are some of the things Canada is providing.

• (1755)

Let me give some examples of results which demonstrate that Canada, our great country, can make a difference around the world.

Afghanistan has a new constitution now and has held democratic presidential and parliamentary elections. These are things which just a few short years ago would have been unheard of in that country. There was so much strife. It was a war-torn country with civil wars, large and small, going on for decades.

Twelve thousand villages have access to funding for water needs. Imagine, 12,000 villages in a country that has had a problem getting safe clean drinking water. Living in Canada we turn the taps on and we get fresh water that is safe to drink and safe to bathe in. There are villages in Afghanistan that have not seen that for decades or that have never seen it.

Over four million children are now enrolled in schools in Afghanistan. Tens of thousands of Afghans, a large majority of whom are women, now have access to credit through which they can secure funds to have the opportunity to build better lives for themselves.

I am so proud of the bravery displayed by our forces in Afghanistan and the work we are doing to ensure that Afghanistan is secure and stable with a democratic government. Mr. Speaker, I know you share those thoughts. I know you have shown your concern for the Afghan people and appreciate the role Canada is playing in Afghanistan.

Canada has had a commitment around the world to show leadership in securing peace, in keeping peace and in providing training so that peace can continue. We have done that in so many cases. I am so proud of the role that our soldiers, our police and CIDA are playing. I believe that Canadians are most appreciative of the role that Canada is playing led by our Prime Minister and the Conservative government.

In our throne speech we laid out five priorities that Canadians have told us are at the top of their list, things that they want the government to demonstrate.

At the very top was accountability. We have brought in the new federal accountability act which will give Canadians once again the confidence that the government is being run in a prudent and conscientious manner with honesty and integrity, something that has not been seen for many years.

The prior Liberal government destroyed so much of the confidence and the trust that Canadians had in their government

and we have set about to restore it. The new federal accountability act is a great step. It will set the bar for how governments in this country must behave for decades to come. I am so proud of our Prime Minister and my colleagues who all helped put this federal accountability act together. It is something we as a Conservative government under the leadership of our Prime Minister have placed before Parliament.

I know that my colleagues on the other side of the House are going to support the accountability act as well. They realize the importance of restoring the confidence that Canadians once had in their government and which was so sadly taken away from them over the last 13 years.

• (1800)

The GST reduction will benefit all Canadians by providing good tax relief. There will be child care that works. It recognizes that families all across this country, whether they are urban or rural, who have preschool children need help to provide care for those children while the parents try to provide for the family financially.

Cutting wait times at the hospital for critical care is another priority and Canadians have supported that. We are proud of our government and the leadership of our Prime Minister.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member spent quite a bit of time talking about foreign affairs, so I thought I should ask him a question regarding foreign affairs.

There is a report that a concentration camp has been found in China for Falun Gong practitioners and there is much concern about that. There is also a case about a gentleman whose name is Huseyinca Celil, a Canadian citizen from Burlington. He was detained in Uzbekistan and is facing extradition to China where he has been sentenced to death in absentia. Once extradited he likely will face the death penalty.

In the last election the Prime Minister asked Canadians to stand up for Canada. I wonder if the member would agree that maybe the question the people would like to ask the Prime Minister now is will he stand up for Canadians and intervene when there are Canadians abroad who are in difficulty?

The case of Mr. Celil is supported by Amnesty International, the Coalition of Muslim Organizations of Canada and other NGOs and the Celil family. They are pleading for the life of this Canadian abroad who is being held against his will. This is an issue of standing up for Canadians.

Will the hon. member, as a member of Parliament for 13 years, ask the foreign affairs minister and the Prime Minister to intervene immediately before this becomes another Maher Arar case?

Mr. Richard Harris: Mr. Speaker, I am not familiar with the Celil case, but I am familiar with the article regarding the alleged concentration camp where practitioners of Falun Gong have allegedly been held and there have been some tremendous human rights violations reported. It caught my eye because of the gravity of the article and the alleged human rights violations.

I want to assure the member that I am concerned about it. I will indeed bring it to the attention of our foreign affairs minister. I know that he is already aware of it, but I will make it my duty as a Canadian, someone who respects human rights in our country and around the world and someone who believes that countries that do not have respect for human rights should be taken to task in the strongest fashion. Canada with its record of human rights has a right to demand that countries we have a diplomatic arrangement with respect human rights in the same manner that Canada holds them so dearly in this country.

I will make that commitment to the member. I know he will join me if we have to pursue that cause in the House of Commons.

• (1805)

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Cariboo—Prince George talked about the accountability act, the importance of it and the important material included in it, but there is one thing that is missing. It is the thing that fails to address the first major accountability crisis of the government, which is the defection, the floor crossing of the Minister of International Trade and the disrespect that he showed to the voters of Vancouver Kingsway who elected him as a Liberal, only to find him sitting as a Conservative in the House.

The NDP had proposals that we voted on in the last Parliament. In fact, some Conservatives supported that legislation in the last Parliament to ensure that when someone changed parties in this place, he or she would either sit as an independent or resign and submit to a byelection to give his or her constituents the ultimate choice about which corner of this House he or she would sit in.

Could the hon. member comment on the failure of the Conservative government to include floor crossing legislation as part of its accountability package?

Mr. Richard Harris: Mr. Speaker, I am sure that when the accountability act comes into the House for debate, members of opposition parties will put their views forward, both in the House and in committee, and propose some amendments. It is a work in progress. We welcome input from the members of the NDP, the Liberal Party and the Bloc. We look forward to their amendments being put forward and we can have a lively debate on them.

At this point, I would remind the member from the NDP that there is no such legislation in place at this time. Maybe at the end of the debate and the vote there will be.

Regarding the member for Vancouver Kingsway, who is now a member of our party, we made a darn good catch. The member, who decided that the Conservative Party was the best place for him, is going to serve our country well. It is good for British Columbia, it is good for the government and it is good for Canada. I am glad we have a catch like that member.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is my maiden speech in this Parliament and this gives me the opportunity, despite the limited time that I have, to take a moment to thank the voters of my riding who returned me with an substantially increased mandate and who turned out in great numbers this election. I am very appreciative to them.

The Address

I am appreciative to the fantastic campaign team that worked for me, headed by Mike Firth, my campaign manager. In particular, I am grateful to the folks who work with me in my office at Parliament Hill as well in my offices in the constituency in Carleton Place and Napanee. I thought I might just mention them by name. Shandy, Sonia, Steve and Brad work here on Parliament Hill, all of whom do a fantastic job. Anita and John work at my Napanee office, who do great constituency work. Sam, Andrea and Carol work at the Carleton Place office. Then there is my executive assistant, Mindy Conlin, who has been my pillar of strength and who also served as my memory very often for the last four and a half years, and has just been poached from me by the justice minister. All of them have been fantastic supporters for me and have done a great deal to make me a more successful representative in my riding.

I wanted to talk a bit about the fact that this is the shortest Speech from the Throne in living memory, but it is also the most focused Speech from the Throne in living memory. As everybody knows, there are many fewer words in this Speech from the Throne than there were in the one produced by the former Liberal government in the 38th Parliament, and there is a reason for that. We have an agenda and we can state it briefly and succinctly. It often takes many more words to say that one has nothing to say than it does to simply state what one's priorities are.

By now I suspect that many Canadians are familiar with the five priorities of our government, which we outlined in the election, again in the Speech from the Throne and subsequently, we are starting to demonstrate in our actions.

I am referring, first, to the new ethical standards laid out in the law, the federal accountability act; second, to the reduction in the GST from 7% to 6%, which will be included in our budget; third, to the legislation regarding the security and safety of our streets, our towns and our neighbourhoods, particularly with regard to toughening the offences for the misuse of firearms in the commissions of crime; fourth, to the giving of choice to parents in child care through the \$1,200 payment that will be given annually to all parents of children under the age of six; and finally, but definitely not the least important, to the action that we are going to take, which was outlined in the Speech from the Throne, with regard to achieving shorter waiting times in conjunction with the provinces.

In short, if we put things a little differently, the Speech from the Throne is about higher ethical standards, lower taxes, safer streets, better and more accessible child care and faster high-quality public health care.

Is that focused? Absolutely, but it is also, from our other point of view, extraordinarily ambitious, particularly given the small number of words in which it was laid out.

The Address

I only have a few minutes and, therefore, I will turn my attention to the one aspect of the Speech from the Throne and of the government's agenda that matters the most to me. I think this is a metaphor for how in a very few words we have summarized a very ambitious agenda. This is the democratic reform agenda. I was the critic for democratic reform in the last Parliament. I now serve as the deputy House leader and, therefore, as an assistant to the Minister for Democratic Reform. On the one hand, what we say in the Speech from the Throne on the subject of democratic reform is very brief. We say this:

Building on the work begun in the last Parliament, this Government will seek to involve parliamentarians and citizens in examining the challenges facing Canada's electoral system and democratic institutions.

However, look at what this means. In terms of that part of the government's agenda that has already been laid in the legislation, and there is more to come, it means we are taking the financial reforms in the federal accountability act which are going to permanently remove the influence of money on federal politics. We are taking this element of our system out of it completely.

● (1810)

We will be removing all corporate and union donations, not merely to federal parties but to candidates, leadership campaigns and for nominations. We will ensure that only individuals can donate. To ensure that no individual can buy influence, we will be reducing the amount that individuals can donate down from \$5,000 per individual to \$1,000 per individual per annum.

Another important issue arose in the last Parliament from a private member's bill. We will ensure that senior electoral officials in every riding in the country will be people who are appointed based on merit not on partisan considerations. This was an idea brought forward by the Bloc Québécois, supported by the New Democrats

and is now incorporated into the legislation. This is a tremendous step forward and will do a great deal to ensure we have a fair electoral system.

We also talked about changes to the Senate. We had many other elements in the Speech from the Throne or elements that were hinted at which will be coming forward in our government's agenda.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to order made Tuesday, April 11, 2006, the question on the motion as amended is deemed put and agreed to.

(Motion as amended agreed to)

● (1815)

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the Address be engrossed and presented to Her Excellency the Governor General by the Speaker.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6:16 p.m., the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24 (1).

(The House adjourned at 6:17 p.m.)

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