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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, April 15, 2010

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, April 15, 2010

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)
[English]

FAIRNESS AT THE PUMPS ACT

Hon. Diane Finley (for the Minister of Industry) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-14, An Act to amend the Electricity and Gas Inspection Act and the Weights and Measures Act.

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

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MOTOR VEHICLE SAFETY ACT

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.) moved, seconded by the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina, for leave to introduce Bill C-512, An Act to amend the Motor Vehicle Safety Act (side guards).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Trinity—Spadina for seconding my private member's bill. I know she has advocated for the changes that I seek to make in this bill as well.

Today I am introducing a private member's bill to increase road safety. The bill would amend the Motor Vehicle Safety Act to ensure that all vehicles in the higher weight categories that are manufactured or imported to Canada would be equipped with side guard protection. With the passage of the bill, Canada would join the European Union and Australia in protecting its citizens such as pedestrians and cyclists against the risk of falling under the sides of vehicles in higher weight categories.

My province of Newfoundland and Labrador has recognized the value of this safety measure and is installing side guards on its new fleet of snow removal equipment. Many lives could be saved if these measures were in place. The tragic loss of Jessica Holman-Price has moved her family into action on this very issue and her family brought this information to me. Her parents are with us today as well.

I urge all members of the House to support this bill when it comes up for debate.

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

• (1005)

PETITIONS

NORTH KOREAN REFUGEES

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition today that has been signed by hundreds of residents of southern Ontario, from Scarborough, Toronto, Mississauga, Brampton, right through to London, Ontario. These Canadians are very concerned about the human rights situation in North Korea. There are thousands of refugees who try to escape the brutal, despotic thugs who run the North Korean government.

The petitioners call upon the House of Commons and the Government of Canada to support my Motion No. 383 and vigorously participate in an international effort to urge the government of China to ensure the safe passage of North Korean refugees, so that they can leave and go to South Korea or other parts of the world. It is a desperate human rights situation in North Korea provoked by a despotic government. The petitioners call on the Government of Canada and the Parliament of Canada to support North Korean refugees to bring an end to this crisis.

ASSISTED SUICIDE

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition I would like to table from people in my riding. It includes over 160 signatures from such places as Maxville, Alexandria, Dunvegan, Vankleek Hill, Alfred, et cetera. The people who have signed this petition value human life, particularly at its most vulnerable stages. I am speaking of the elderly and the sick. The petitioners are asking parliamentarians to vote against Bill C-384, which is the bill that seeks to legalize euthanasia and assisted suicide.

CREDIT AND DEBIT CARD INDUSTRY

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today.

The first petition is signed by dozens of Canadians calling on the House of Commons and the government to bring greater accountability and transparency to the credit card industry. Debit card transactions are currently handled by Interac, which is a non-profit organization made up of Canadian banks. Debit card fees are currently flat fees per transaction, and there is no review process for increases to credit card or debit card fees at this time.

In addition, there is no requirement that credit card and debit card fees be disclosed at the point of sale to consumers. Also, debit card and credit card fees can be increased without justification.

Routine Proceedings

Credit card fees are a percentage of the total sale, and the federal government is prepared, now, to allow Visa and MasterCard to enter the debit card business, effectively allowing Visa and MasterCard to change from small flat fees to a fee which would greatly increase the cost of all purchases.

The petitioners demand that the Conservative government enshrines in legislation that debit cards be kept at a flat fee and that credit card fees be made transparent and accountable.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition, also signed by dozens of Canadians, requests an end to the war in Afghanistan. Canadian soldiers and Afghan citizens continue to die in a never-ending war that gets worse with each new deployment of troops. There has been a 40% increase in civilians killed in 2008, with more than 100 tons of bombs dropped by NATO each month. Clearly, women's rights are not on the agenda of the Afghan government. The war has cost Canadians more than \$18 billion. That money could have been used to improve health care and seniors' pensions right here in Canada.

Polls continue to show a clear majority of Canadians want the war to end before the scheduled removal date of 2011. The petitioners call on the government to bring home the troops now.

SEEDS REGULATIONS

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to table a petition signed by approximately 150 people from across Canada who are in support of Bill C-474 and GMO seeds.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 13, 20, 21, 30, 40, 51 and 94.

[Text]

Question No. 13—**Hon. Marlene Jennings:**

With regard to the vaccine for influenza A (H1N1): (a) what contractual agreements exist between the government and GlaxoSmithKline for the production of this vaccine; and (b) what contractual agreements exist between the federal government and any provincial government for the distribution of the vaccine?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the response is as follows: a) The World Health Organization has recognized Canada as a leader in pandemic preparedness and one of the first countries in the world to put in place a domestic contract for pandemic influenza vaccine production.

Since 2001, the Government of Canada has had a 10-year contract in place with ID Biomedical, now GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) Biologicals, to assure a state of pandemic readiness in case of an influenza pandemic and to supply Canada with pandemic influenza vaccine on a priority basis. Under this contract, GSK is required to develop and maintain a production capacity in Canada of a minimum of eight million doses of pandemic vaccine per month for four months, enough to immunize all Canadians.

The H1N1 pandemic vaccines were produced at GSK's manufacturing facility in Ste-Foy, Quebec. GSK supplied Canada with enough doses of the pandemic vaccine to meet domestic requirements.

b) Under the vaccine contract, GSK is required to distribute pandemic vaccine from its manufacturing site to specified depots as identified by provinces and territories.

Question No. 20—**Hon. Larry Bagnell:**

With regard to the report done by Natural Resources Canada "From Impacts to Adaptation: Canada in a Changing Climate 2007", what are the estimated economic costs (2010-2050) of adaptation to the following significant impacts as identified regionally in the report: (a) rising sea levels triggering more frequent and higher storm surges, and subsequent flooding in the provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island; (b) rising sea levels in the provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island, especially in southeastern New Brunswick; (c) coastal erosion triggered by storm surges, flooding and rising sea levels, including the economic costs of infrastructure threatened by coastal erosion, in the Provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island; (d) river flooding from the increased participation and a variable winter climate in the provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island; (e) damage caused by the increased frequency of ice storms in the Province of Quebec; (f) infrastructure sensitivity in Nunavik due to thawing permafrost; (g) vulnerability of coastal zones to sea level rise, flood risks and saltwater intrusion into groundwater in the Province of Ontario; (h) infrastructure impacts of near shore lake warming; (i) infrastructure and transportation impacts of decreasing water levels in the Great Lakes, especially on the shipping industry; (j) impacts to the energy system from reduced hydroelectric output; (k) potential arrival of the mountain pine beetle, in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba; (l) diminished surface water resources; (m) impact of increased drought on the agricultural sector and water systems; (n) increased extreme rainfall events; (o) spread of mountain pine beetle infestation, in Canada's Northern Communities; (p) the impact on northern communities and businesses of the expected reduction in the availability of ice roads, especially in the mining industry; (q) the impact of melting permafrost on community and industrial infrastructure, including waste containment structures; (r) replacing food that has been secured through traditional and subsistence activities; (s) climate related changes in forest productivity in the Province of British Columbia (B.C.); (t) the impact of rising sea levels on coastal communities and infrastructure; (u) the impact of abrupt changes and/or distribution of pacific salmon, sardine, anchovy, and western red cedar; (v) the impact on B.C.'s hydroelectric system of water shortages; (w) the impact of drought and water shortages on agriculture in the B.C. interior, especially in the Okanagan region; (x) regarding these impacts, and others identified in the 2007 report, what is the government's climate change adaptation strategy; and (y) if the government does not have a climate change adaptation strategy, when will one be developed, and what is the mechanism for doing so?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the report "From Impacts to Adaptation: Canada in a Changing Climate 2007", coordinated by Natural Resources Canada and published on March 7, 2008, is a comprehensive scientific assessment of climate change impacts and adaptation in Canada. The goal of the report was to provide a state-of-the-science synthesis that identified important climate change impacts in Canada and to provide a knowledge foundation for adaptation decision-making.

Routine Proceedings

Since publication of “From Impacts to Adaptation: Canada in a Changing Climate 2007”, the Government of Canada through various departments and agencies has undertaken a number of initiatives to improve its knowledge of the economic costs of both climate change impacts and of adaptation. These on-going initiatives include: 1. Natural Resources Canada’s “Guidance on the Economics of Adaptation” project which will provide practical guidelines to better i) understand and assess the economic threats and opportunities presented by climate change and ii) cost, prioritize and sequence adaptation strategies into plans and budgets in a context of uncertainty and competing needs. 2. Environment Canada’s examination of approaches to estimating and forecasting the economic impacts of climate change which will focus initially on the economic impacts on Canadian space heating and cooling expenditures, agriculture production, and costs associated with sea level rise. 3. The National Roundtable on the Environment and Economy’s “Economic Risks and Opportunities of Climate Change” program which includes research to estimate sector-specific costs of climate change impacts and the role of adaptation in reducing costs, focussing on public infrastructure, human health, forestry, and coastal zones.

In addition to this work on methodologies and cross-sectoral analysis, many federal departments are now looking at the economic costs of climate change impacts and adaptation as part of their own risk management processes.

One of the key findings of “Canada in a Changing Climate” was that a wide range of players are involved in adaptation decision-making, including all levels of government, the private sector, and individuals / community organizations. Hence additional work on the economic costs of adaptation is being undertaken by provincial and territorial governments, municipalities, resource managers, etc.

Natural Resources Canada has developed a new regional adaptation collaborative, RAC, program to help advance adaptation decision-making across Canada by drawing together a diverse array of public and private stakeholders and focusing on the development of guidance and best practices, including economic analysis. The program will support focussed collaboration at the regional level among government, non-government decision-makers, and technical experts to facilitate regional adaptation planning and decision-making. More information can be found at www.adaptation.nrcan.gc.ca.

Question No. 21—Hon. Larry Bagnell:

With respect to the government’s 2020 target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20% from 2006 levels: (a) what is the government assessment on how Canada will meet the 2020 target; (b) what is the government estimated emission levels for each year in the period 2010-2020, in megatonnes, specifically noting which year Canadian emissions will peak; (c) how many emission credits will need to be purchased to meet the 2020 target, and where does the government intend to purchase them from; (d) what does the government estimate the carbon price, under the carbon pricing scheme that the government plans on using, will be for each year in the period 2010-2020; and (e) in detail, following the statement of the Minister of Environment on October 29, 2009, how will the 2020 target be met with a carbon price that is \$28 per tonne?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, consistent with the government’s commitment to harmonize Canada’s approach to climate change with that of the United States in the interest of both our environment and our economy, Canada has

inscribed a target of a 17% reduction in greenhouse gas emission from 2005 levels by 2020. This is the same target inscribed by the United States.

The answers to these questions will ultimately be the product of decisions made by the Government of Canada regarding regulatory action to reduce emissions. Although the government has signaled its intention to move forward on harmonizing its efforts with the approach taken by the United States, the details regarding how the system will work have not yet been established. Consequently, the government is not in a position to answer these questions at this time. However, the government is continuing to work on developing a plan for meeting the 2020 reduction targets.

Question No. 30—Hon. John McKay:

With regard to the government’s Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Counsellor created by Order in Council on March 26, 2009, what progress has the government made in providing the Counsellor with: (a) an official office space that is accessible to the public and space for the Counsellor’s staff; (b) if an office has been provided, where is it located and precisely which offices have been allocated at the given address; (c) if staff have been provided, how many staff does the Counsellor have and what are their functions; (d) what is the budget for the Counsellor’s office and staff; (e) has the Counsellor yet received any complaints in relation to Counsellor’s mandate; (f) why is there no clear and user-friendly information on the government’s Foreign Affairs and International Trade website to assist Canadians in contacting the CSR Counsellor; (g) what is the email address, fax number, phone number and address for the current Counsellor; (h) if an office and staff have not yet been provided, from where is the current Counsellor working and how is she undertaking her responsibilities as mandated by the Order in Council; and (i) if an office and staff have not yet been provided to the Counsellor, when does the Minister expect to provide them, and if they have been provided, on what date were they procured?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the following response is accurate as of March 31, 2010: a) With regard to an official office space that is accessible to the public and space for the counsellor’s staff, Public Works and Government Services Canada has identified space for the Office of the Extractive Sector Corporate Social Responsibility Counsellor at the Dominion Building, 1, Front Street West, 5th Floor, Suite 5110, Toronto, ON, M5J 2X5. The office is currently operational and was opened to the public and other stakeholders on March 08, 2010.

b) With regard if an office has been provided, where it is located and precisely which offices have been allocated at the given address, the office is located on the 5th floor, suite 5110, 1 Front Street West, Toronto, Ontario.

c) With regard if staff have been provided, how many staff does the counsellor have and what are their functions, the counsellor will be supported by two staff. An administrative assistant has been hired. The counsellor is working to fill the senior policy advisor position.

d) With regard to what the budget is for the counsellor’s office and staff, the budget of the Office of the Extractive Sector Corporate Social Responsibility Counsellor is \$654,240 per year, including salaries, travel and other operational expenses.

Routine Proceedings

e) With regard if the counsellor has yet received any complaints in relation to counsellor's mandate, no. The review process outlined in the Order in Council to create the Office of the Extractive Sector Corporate Social Responsibility Counsellor needs to be developed further into a comprehensive and detailed process that is fair, transparent and credible. Early outreach and dialogue conducted by the counsellor with a wide-ranging set of stakeholders indicates that the process used to construct the review mechanism and the rules of procedure must be inclusive, participatory, transparent and multi-stakeholder. The counsellor has begun to construct the framework and methodology and will soon be conducting formal consultations with stakeholders to develop the review mechanism.

f) With regard to why there is no clear and user-friendly information on the government's Foreign Affairs and International Trade website to assist Canadians in contacting the CSR counsellor, the counsellor is in the process of developing a website for the office with website address at www.international.gc.ca/csr-counsellor. In addition, the counsellor's contact information can be found at Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade's Corporate Social Responsibility website at www.csr.gc.ca.

g) With regard to the email address, fax number, phone number and address for the current counsellor, the current contact information for Dr. Marketa Evans is email: marketa.evans@international.gc.ca; telephone: 416 973 2064; fax: to be installed shortly; address: Dominion Building, 1, Front Street West, 5th Floor, Suite 5110, Toronto, ON, M5J 2X5.

h) With regard if an office and staff have not yet been provided, from where is the current counsellor working and how is she undertaking her responsibilities as mandated by the order in council, the office of the counsellor is operational at present? Since the counsellor began work on October 19th, she has met with numerous stakeholders, participated in various conferences, workshops and seminars, including discussions with the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises. Her activities have necessarily focused on her engagement with stakeholders as they will have an integral role to play in assisting her to develop a robust review mechanism that is fair, transparent and credible.

i) With regard if an office and staff have not yet been provided to the counsellor, when does the minister expect to provide them, and if they have been provided, on what date were they procured? The counsellor's office located at Dominion Building, 1, Front Street, 5th Floor, Suite 5110 is operational. Staffing process has been partially filled with the hiring of the administrative assistant. The counsellor is working to fill the senior policy advisor position.

Question No. 40—Mr. Nathan Cullen:

With regard to Canada's supply of fossil fuels: (a) what are Natural Resources Canada's estimates of Canada's total fossil fuel supplies recoverable under present economic conditions; (b) what are the government's estimates of international supplies of recoverable fossil fuels; (c) what are the government's estimates for the peaking of Canadian fossil fuel production; and (d) what are the government's estimates for the peaking of international fossil fuel production?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the answer is as follows: a) According to the National Energy Board's, NEB, July 2009 reference case scenario, Canada's natural gas resource base is estimated at 439

trillion cubic feet, TCF, which would last more than 80 years at current production rates. As new shale gas resources are evaluated, this estimate could rise. The total natural gas resource includes proven reserves, which are ready to produce, plus estimated volumes, which are likely to be found and produced in the future.

According to a May 2009 NEB report, Canada's total remaining conventional crude oil and crude bitumen, oil sands, reserves are 176.8 billion barrels, Bbbl. This represents the crude oil and bitumen that can be economically extracted from the ground with a high degree of certainty using existing technology. At 176.8 Bbbl, Canada's proven oil reserves are second only to Saudi Arabia and would last approximately 200 years at the current rate of production. Alberta estimates that an additional 315 Bbbl of bitumen could ultimately be recovered from the oil sands with anticipated technological advancements.

Based on the World Energy Council's Survey of Energy Resources 2007, Canada has 8.7 billion tonnes, BT, of proven coal resources in place, of which 6.6 BT have been identified as recoverable reserves. At the present production rate, Canada's recoverable coal reserves would offer approximately 94 years of production.

b) Organizations such as the International Energy Agency, IEA, and the NEB rely on global energy resource and reserve estimates from the Oil and Gas Journal and the United States's, U.S., Geological Survey. The world's proven oil reserves have doubled in size since 1980. According to the U.S. Geological Survey's reference scenario, three trillion barrels, Tbbl, of oil could ultimately be recovered globally.

According to the Oil and Gas Journal's annual "World-wide Look at Oil and Gas Reserves", global proven oil and natural gas reserves are estimated at 1,342 Bbbl and 6,254 TCF respectively. Since 1980, the world's proven oil and natural gas reserves have doubled in volume. World natural gas supplies have a probable lifetime in excess of 130 years.

According to the IEA's coal information 2009, the world's proven recoverable coal reserves amounts to 990 BT. Based on the 2008 production rate, the world's recoverable coal reserves would provide approximately 145 years of production.

c) The latest NEB oil futures reports indicate that Canada's oil production is not expected to peak in the foreseeable future. Rather, Canadian crude production will continue to increase to the year 2030, led by oil sands production.

Canada's conventional natural gas production rate may have peaked at 494.8 million cubic metres per day, 17.5 billion cubic feet per day, in 2001. However, shale gas development in Canada is just beginning and could lead to higher annual Canadian natural gas production.

Canada produces coking coal and thermal coal, the production of which is projected to remain stable in the short- to mid-term as no new coal-fired power generation plants are expected to come on stream.

Routine Proceedings

It is also important to note that Canada has vast amounts of oil and natural gas “in place”, or known to exist underground. These volumes are not currently included in resource estimates, as these “in place” volumes are not recoverable using current technology. For example, the total discovered oil sands “in place” volume is estimated at 1.7 Ttbl; significantly more than the total global oil production to date. As technology continues to improve, some of the “in place” volumes which are not currently economically recoverable are likely to become recoverable.

d) According to the IEA’s World Energy Outlook 2009, global oil, natural gas and coal production is expected to grow between now and 2030 and no peak in production is forecast in the reference scenario. The reference scenario is a long-term production estimate based on current government policies.

Question No. 51—**Ms. Siobhan Coady:**

With regard to Public Works and Government Services Canada: (a) what are the total number of contracts under \$10,000 awarded between January 2008 and December 2009; (b) what were the names of the suppliers; (c) what services did they provide; (d) what were the start and end dates of each contract; and (e) what was the contractor code for each supplier?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the data required to properly answer that question are contained in five separate databases and represent over 80,000 raw data entries.

To answer the question as it was asked, the data would have to be extracted and manually confirmed using electronic and paper records. All the data would then have to be consolidated in a single document. Given the allotted deadline, it would be impossible for us to produce all the requested information.

Question No. 94—**Mr. Scott Andrews:**

With regard to the Department of Veterans Affairs and, more specifically, the Veterans Independence Program (VIP) and VIP Expansion, for each of the fiscal years 2006-2007 to 2008-2009 and the period ending February 28, 2010 of fiscal year 2009-2010: (a) how many individuals were receiving benefits; (b) how much financial assistance was paid out under the program; and (c) how much was paid out for each specific category of housekeeping and grounds maintenance?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the 2006-2007 fiscal year, 101,267 clients received VIP benefits of \$286.7 million. Of this amount \$156.5 million was for housekeeping and \$42.1 million for grounds maintenance. In fiscal year 2007-2008 there were 103,119 clients who received a total of \$303.2 million with \$170.3 million for housekeeping and \$46.2 million for grounds maintenance. In fiscal year 2008-2009, 106,076 clients received a total of \$320 million of which \$179.7 was for housekeeping and \$48.9 million for grounds maintenance.

In fiscal year 2009-2010, as of February 28, there were 105,816 VIP clients with expenditures of \$307.4 million of which \$175.4 million was for housekeeping and \$44.9 million was for grounds maintenance.

• (1010)

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Questions Nos. 1, 7, 8, 9, 25, 26, 34, 37, 39, 53, 55, 56, 67, 71 and 75 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

Mr. Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 1—**Mr. Jean-Claude D’Amours:**

With regard to Service Canada offices in the riding of Madawaska—Restigouche, specifically Edmunston, Saint-Quentin, Campbellton and Dalhousie: (a) how many positions were there in each of these offices in 2006; (b) how many people held these positions; (c) how many positions were there in these offices as of November 18, 2009; and (d) how many people held these positions as of November 18, 2009?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 7—**Mrs. Alexandra Mendes:**

With respect to contracts under \$10,000 granted by the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec since January 1, 2008, what are: (a) the names of the contractors; (b) the amounts of the contracts; (c) the dates of the contracts; (d) the dates of completion; and (e) the descriptions of the services provided?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 8—**Mrs. Alexandra Mendes:**

Within the constituency of Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, what was the total amount of government funding since fiscal year 2005-2006 up to and including the current fiscal year, itemized according to (i) the date the money was received in the riding, (ii) the dollar amount of the expenditure, (iii) the program from which the funding came, (iv) the ministry responsible, (v) the designated recipient?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 9—**Mrs. Alexandra Mendes:**

With regards to the repairs to the Champlain Bridge in Montreal, what are: (a) all repairs conducted from 2007 to 2009; (b) the names of the contractors; (c) the amounts of the contracts; (d) the dates of the contracts; (e) the dates of completion; (f) the descriptions of the services provided; and (g) the contracts awarded on an emergency basis?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 25—**Mr. Todd Russell:**

With regard to government television advertising: (a) how much has the government spent on promoting Canada’s National Anti-Drug Strategy; (b) which department commissioned the recent or current television spot; (c) how much did it cost to produce this ad; (d) which firm produced the ad; and (e) how many such spots have aired, or planned to air, per week, on each television station, network, or channel?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 26—**Mr. John Cannis:**

With regard to the Building Canada Fund: (a) what projects are being funded; (b) what federal electoral district is each project located in; (c) who applied for the funding for each project; and (d) what is the exact amount of money allocated to each project?

(Return tabled)

*Privilege***Question No. 34—Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:**

With regard to inmates who served at least one day of a term of imprisonment at Dorchester Penitentiary since 1990, what is the recidivism rate, broken down by year, for those who: (a) participated in the prison farm program; (b) did not participate in the prison farm program but in a different vocational program offered by CORCAN; and (c) did not participate in any program offered by CORCAN?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 37—Hon. Maria Minna:

With regard to the Labour Mobility Chapter of the Agreement on Internal Trade: (a) what actions has the government taken to ease the mobility of workers across provinces; (b) which occupations are specified in the Agreement for mobility of workers; (c) are the changes that came into effect April 1, 2009 permanent or temporary; (d) how many occupations will still require additional testing in order to move between provinces, and what are those occupations; (e) who was consulted regarding the changes that came into effect on April 1, 2009; and (f) has any province been found in violation of this Agreement between January 1, 2009 and November 5, 2009 and, if so, have any fines or penalties been imposed?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 39—Hon. Maria Minna:

With regard to the Temporary Foreign Worker Program: (a) how many applications were approved for each year from 2005 to 2009; (b) how many violations were made in each of the years in (a) by (i) employers, (ii) workers; (c) what penalties were imposed for those violations; (d) what actions has the government taken to allow organized unions to employ a temporary foreign worker if the employer for which they came to Canada to work was found in violation or fired the worker; (e) what mechanism is in place for the government to protect the workers' rights once they have arrived in Canada; and (f) will employers that have been found in violation in the past be included on the black-list the government proposed on October 9, 2009?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 53—Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:

With respect to contracts under \$10,000 granted by the Department of Citizenship and Immigration between January 1 and October 21, 2009, what are the: (a) vendors names; (b) contracts' reference numbers; (c) dates of the contracts; (d) descriptions of the services provided; (e) delivery dates; (f) original contracts' values; and (g) final contracts' values if different from the original contracts' values?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 55—Hon. Mauril Bélanger:

With respect to French-language training, for each of the fiscal years from 2005-2006 through 2008-2009: (a) how much was spent by the government on language training for new immigrants in each province and territory; and (b) what are the names of the third parties who received money for language training for new immigrants in each province and territory, and how much did each one receive?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 56—Hon. Mauril Bélanger:

With respect to English-language training, for each of the fiscal years from 2005-2006 through 2008-2009: (a) how much was spent by the government on language training for new immigrants in each province and territory; and (b) what are the names of the third parties who received money for language training for new immigrants in each province and territory, and how much did each one receive?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 67—Ms. Kirsty Duncan:

With respect to humanitarian issues and crisis and Canada's involvement: (a) how does Canada increase awareness around the world that abuse of children, minorities, women, etc. will be punished; (b) how often is humanitarian evidence examined in Canada, and by whom; (c) what accountability measures are in place to demonstrate Canada's commitments with respect to human rights internationally; (d) what processes are in place to give Canadian family members information, and to

give information on how to help; (e) what processes are in place or can be put in place to allow Canadians to sponsor family members more quickly if required; (f) what, if any, audit process follows Canada's direct or indirect involvement during a humanitarian crisis; (g) what, if any, process follows the resolution of a humanitarian crisis, and how Canada performed with respect to it; (h) what opportunity, if any, is there for Canadians to have their input in such an audit process; and (i) with respect to Canada's involvement during last year's crisis in Sri Lanka, (i) what, if any, audit will follow Canada's involvement, (ii) what, if any, evidence is Canada receiving that might suggest violations against children, minorities, and women, (iii) what steps, if applicable, is Canada taking to address such evidence?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 71—Mr. Don Davies:

With respect to deaths related to actions by members of the RCMP: (a) for each of the last 20 years, how many deaths were in relation to (i) individuals being held in RCMP custody, (ii) inadvertent actions against bystanders, (iii) individuals being arrested by the RCMP, (iv) individuals fleeing RCMP custody; (b) in relation to these deaths, broken down by year and within each category, how many resulted in charges being laid against RCMP officers or officials; and (c) of these charges laid, broken down by year and within each category, how many charges (i) were dropped before prosecution, (ii) were prosecuted but did not result in a conviction, (iii) were prosecuted and did result in a conviction?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 75—Hon. Dan McTeague:

With regard to the provision of consular affairs, for the fiscal years 2005-2006 to 2008-2009: (a) what are all foreign missions operated by the government; and (b) what is the number of staff members tasked with the provision of consular services in each mission?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I ask that all remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Translation]

The Speaker: The House has been notified that the hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord wishes to raise a question of privilege. I will now hear his intervention.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

USURPATION OF THE TITLE OF MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the last general election held on October 14, 2008, the Conservatives lost a seat in Alberta. In the riding of Edmonton—Strathcona, Rahim Jaffer was defeated by the NDP candidate. Consequently, since that election, Mr. Jaffer cannot claim to be an MP because to be an MP, he would have had to have been elected, which is not the case.

However, in the April 13 edition of *Le Devoir* in an article written by Hélène Buzzetti, we learned that:

Rahim Jaffer was defeated in the 2008 election but even recently he was handing out his MP business cards. He had the Conservative Party logo on his Internet site and was using a parliamentary BlackBerry provided by his spouse, which gave him a government address.

Privilege

By allowing people to believe that he was still an MP, Rahim Jaffer committed a flagrant act of obstruction and interference. In fact, O'Brien-Bosc states, on page 111:

It is impossible to codify all incidents which might be interpreted as matters of obstruction, interference, molestation or intimidation and as such constitute prima facie cases of privilege. However, some matters found to be prima facie include the damaging of a Member's reputation, the usurpation of the title of Member of Parliament, the intimidation of Members and their staff and of witnesses before committees, and the provision of misleading information.

More specifically, with regard to the matter of usurpation of the title of member of Parliament, I refer you to page 113 of O'Brien-Bosc:

The misrepresentation of someone who is not a sitting Member as a Member of Parliament has been found to constitute a prima facie case of privilege on two occasions. On May 6, 1985, Speaker Bosley ruled that there was a prima facie question of privilege in a case where a newspaper advertisement identified another person as a Member of Parliament rather than the sitting Member. He [Speaker Bosley] stated:

"It should go without saying that a Member of Parliament needs to perform his functions effectively and that anything tending to cause confusion as to a Member's identity creates the possibility of an impediment to the fulfilment of that Member's functions. Any action which impedes or tends to impede a Member in the discharge of his duties is a breach of privilege."

Page 113 also refers to a ruling that concerns you personally, Mr. Speaker. I remember that you ruled on the question of usurpation of the title of member of Parliament in 2004. I quote:

...a similar question of privilege was raised concerning a booklet published in connection with a fundraising event and which contained an advertisement identifying a former Member of Parliament as the sitting Member for the riding.

You ruled that there was a prima facie case of breach of privilege, and you referred the matter to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

On the surface, since Rahim Jaffer acted in a manner that implied that he was still a member of Parliament, one might think he breached the privileges of only the member for Edmonton—Strathcona, the riding he formerly represented.

● (1015)

But by handing out his former business cards, the member gave the impression that the position of member of Parliament could be used for financial gain. We know that serious allegations of influence peddling have been circulating about Rahim Jaffer for several days now. He has tarnished the reputation of all politicians. We feel strongly that this is a serious impediment to the performance of our parliamentary duties. He has breached the privileges of all 308 members, including you, Mr. Speaker, who were legitimately elected on October 14, 2008. In so doing, Rahim Jaffer has damaged the reputation and credibility of the House of Commons as an institution.

Objectively, this conduct is unacceptable, but the fact that it involves someone who sat as a member of this House for nearly 12 years is totally repugnant. I am raising this question of privilege to protect my privileges and those of the other Bloc Québécois members and all members.

The use and the reputation of the title of member of Parliament must be protected, and I call on you as the guardian of our privileges, Mr. Speaker. The 308 members of the House of Commons elected you democratically to occupy the Speaker's chair because they had

confidence in you as the guardian of members' privileges. That is your role, and the best proof of this is that even though you belong to a political party, you no longer attend caucus meetings because you are above partisanship. My colleagues and I need you to maintain and preserve our parliamentary privileges, which is why I am raising this question of privilege.

What Rahim Jaffer did is not a harmless act committed by mistake or in good faith. Clearly, he must have known that he had been defeated in the most recent election. He therefore acted deliberately, with highly questionable intentions.

Consequently, Mr. Speaker, I am raising this question of privilege on behalf of all the members of this House, from all parties, over whom you preside. In the event you should find my question to be in order, I have prepared an appropriate motion that I can move.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Joliette wish to speak to the same issue?

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, on April 1, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons rose on a point of order to state that an amendment was inadmissible, the amendment proposed by my colleague from Chambly—Borduas to Bill C-304, introduced by an NDP member to—

The Speaker: That is a point of order. It is a different issue than the one already brought up, and I want to say something regarding the comments of the hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord.

If what was reported in *Le Devoir* is true, and if the former member for Edmonton—Strathcona recently handed out his parliamentary business cards, this is a serious issue and a breach of the privileges of this House.

As hon. members know, Mr. Jaffer was the member for Edmonton—Strathcona during the 39th Parliament but was not re-elected in the 2008 election.

The details of other similar situations have been provided, and I thank the hon. member. In this case, it is difficult for the Chair to sort out the facts, since the House has not received any evidence other than an allegation in a newspaper article.

For the time being, I will take this issue under consideration. The Chair will wait for additional information, if it is available. Perhaps then I will decide whether this is a question of privilege.

The hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord wishes to add something.

● (1020)

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I want to make sure I understand the status of the question of privilege I just raised. If, in the next few days, you do not receive any additional evidence, does that mean that you will rule on the merits of my question of privilege regardless?

The Speaker: Yes, I can do that. I am afraid that there is not enough evidence at this time, and I will wait for additional details, if they are available. After that, if it is necessary to issue a ruling, I will certainly do so.

Point of Order

Now, the hon. member for Joliette on a point of order.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

BILL C-304—AN ACT TO ENSURE ADEQUATE, ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I had understood that you were going to consider the question and I rose on my point of order a little too quickly. As you know, in the Bloc Québécois, we are quick off the mark.

As I was saying, on April 1 the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons rose on a point of order to have an amendment moved by the member for Chambly—Borduas to Bill C-304 ruled inadmissible. That bill was introduced by an NDP member with the goal of creating a national housing strategy. In fact, we should call it a Canada-wide housing strategy. Since the Quebec nation has been recognized by this House, there are at least two nations in the Canadian political space, if not more, counting the first nations and the Acadian nation.

The amendment proposed by my colleague would allow the government of Quebec to opt out of the Canada-wide strategy and to receive an unconditional payment equal to the total amount that would have been paid within its territory under that strategy. That is a very familiar principle: the right to withdraw unconditionally and with full compensation.

In his submission, the parliamentary secretary to the minister asserted that the national housing strategy has to be developed in collaboration with all provincial and territorial ministers, and that any amendment to exempt a province would be inconsistent with the purpose of the bill. Obviously, I do not share that view, since there are already many examples of so-called national strategies that are in fact Canada-wide strategies, in which Quebec does not participate, and this is not something new.

In the early 1960s, for example, Quebec had already established its own pension plan. In 1976 and 1977, if I recall correctly, there was an agreement between the Government of Quebec and the federal government concerning the selection of immigrants. There is also a child care program. If that Canada-wide program had been adopted, as proposed by former Prime Minister Paul Martin, then, because Quebec already had its own system, it would be exempt from the other. I also recall, and I think it was in about 1998, that the government of Quebec and the federal government, after 30 years of negotiations, also agreed to exempt training measures so that Quebec could have its own structure with a commission of partners and local employment centres that deliver those services, which had formerly been offered by the Canadian government. Again, there are several examples of so-called national strategies that are in fact Canada-wide, where Quebec has the right to withdraw unconditionally and with full compensation.

In addition, the purpose of Bill C-304 is to establish a housing strategy, and the amendment would allow Quebec to opt out of the strategy in an area that is already under its jurisdiction: housing and social housing. It is therefore particularly understandable why my colleague from Chambly—Borduas introduced that amendment.

We certainly do not want the fact that Quebec is opting out to keep the other provinces, along with the federal government, from implementing a pan-Canadian strategy.

The committee that studied the bill felt that the Bloc's amendment was very much in keeping with the spirit of the legislation. On October 26, 2006, you rendered a decision—we do read your words, Mr. Speaker—on the admissibility of an amendment accepted by a standing committee, and you spoke about the general principles that guide your evaluation of decisions made in committee:

As all hon. members know, the Chair has always been extremely reluctant to be drawn into procedural arguments over committee proceedings since to do so would reopen matters which are properly left to committees themselves to resolve. Perhaps more significantly, such a practice would also undoubtedly tie up the time of the House in reviews of committee decisions defeating the very purpose of committees.

As I mentioned, the amendment presented by my colleague from Chambly—Borduas was accepted by the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Your comments from 2006, Mr. Speaker, were wise and I see no reason, in this case, to stray from these words of wisdom.

I would therefore ask that you consider the amendment presented my colleague from Chambly—Borduas to be admissible, given that it was accepted by the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

• (1025)

[English]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to address some of the points raised by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons relating to an amendment made in the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities to Bill C-304, An Act to ensure secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing for Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, I will refer to a ruling that you made on January 29, 2008, referring to a committee amendment to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act then before the House. In that ruling, you said:

In essence, what we are dealing with is the distinction between the principle of the bill and its scope. The principle refers to the purpose or objective of a bill, while the scope refers to its legislative scheme or the mechanisms that will give effect to the principle, purpose or objective of a bill.

In Bill C-304, the parliamentary secretary himself stated in his argument on April 1 that the purpose of this bill was to “require the development of a national housing strategy” by having the minister “consult all provincial and territorial ministers on the development of such a strategy”. He then said that the rules explain that amendments cannot be outside the scope or principle of the bill as passed at second reading, a rule with which we are all familiar.

Point of Order

I would submit that while the parliamentary secretary did give an accurate description of the principle and the scope of this bill, the principle is to develop a strategy and the scope or the mechanism is to do that through consultations. The key to the government's argument seems to prejudge what the results of these consultations will be.

The amendment in question is a permissive, not mandatory, amendment. It would give the minister an ability to achieve the principle of the bill, a national housing strategy, by refining the scope in terms of consultation to include an option that has been in place in other social policy strategies throughout Canadian history. Therefore, I would submit that the amendment does not change the scope or purpose of the bill but rather seeks to clarify it.

I believe that the committee chair's opinion on the principle of this bill may have been well-intentioned but the committee members were also correct when they decided that the amendment to allow the minister an option to respond to consultations, up to and including an opt-out for Quebec, was within the scope of possible consultations that are required to allow the minister to meet the principle of the bill, which is to develop a national housing strategy.

This option provided in the amendment is a reasonable one and one which is as old as Canada, the option to treat different parts of our country as different and unique.

The House recently passed a motion to define Quebec as a nation within our nation. We have the Canada pension plan and the national child benefit, two well-functioning national programs that Quebec has chosen not to participate in but instead to provide similar services. Quebec has opted out of the Canada student loans program since 1964 and recently received its transfer of approximately \$125 million from the federal government in support of student financial assistance programs for the most recent academic year.

To go back further, the Liberal government's 2004 action plan on health exempted Quebec from the criteria and accountability set up for all other provinces and territories while guaranteeing full health transfer payments.

A further example is Canada's Social Union Framework Agreement of 2002, which was a pan-Canadian approach to the reform of Canada's health and social policy systems to which all provinces were signatories except Quebec. The Canada-Quebec accord on immigration allows Quebec to establish its own immigration requirements, distinct from the rest of Canada.

Governments for years, as former prime minister Paul Martin noted, have recognized "Quebec's unique place within the Federation". It is reasonable that members of Parliament understand that any national strategy must reflect Quebec's right to protect its unique nature through the delivery of certain programs.

• (1030)

The amendment in question today does not alter the nature of the bill but clarifies this right. The government argued that, because an amendment to exclude Quebec from Bill S-3 was inadmissible, this amendment on Bill C-304 should also be inadmissible.

However, these two bills are not comparable. Providing the option for Quebec to opt out of a consultation process as outlined in Bill

C-304 does not have the same effect on the act as the exclusion of Quebec does from Bill S-3, which was an act affecting the duties of every federal institution in Canada by enhancing the enforceability of the Government of Canada's obligations and of part 7 of the Official Languages Act.

It is also relevant that the 2005 ruling was not challenged by the majority of the committee members as necessary to the bill, as was the case of the amendment to Bill C-304. The aim of Bill C-304 is to ensure the delivery of the right to adequate housing.

Quebec is in the unique circumstance of having ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, recognizing the right to adequate housing, and currently meets many of the objectives outlined in Bill C-304.

Therefore, as this House stated when it defined Quebec as a nation within a nation, the principle of this bill being a national housing strategy should naturally reflect Parliament's definition of our nation, which is that it can include an asymmetrical form of federalism without changing the principle of being a united Canada.

Quebec has an existing agreement in place with the federal government giving Quebec jurisdiction over the development and delivery of its housing programs, clarifying that Quebec may participate in the process of establishing a national housing strategy, as was the case before the adoption of the amendment. It will only serve to enhance Quebec's potential willingness to participate in the process set out in Bill C-304.

Therefore in closing, I submit that the amendment made in committee is permissive and not mandatory. It only clarifies in nature an acknowledgement of our understanding of a nation within the scope and consistent with the principle of Bill C-304.

I further submit that this is a rare case when the chair's decision on the scope is misplaced and the members of the committee were correct in allowing this amendment to stand.

Mr. Speaker, I hope you will take this into consideration and support the committee members who agree that this amendment does have its rightful place in Bill C-304.

• (1035)

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: I would like to thank the hon. member for Joliette and the hon. member for Vancouver East for their comments on this point.

[*English*]

I will certainly consider their remarks when I review the matter and come back to the House with a ruling on this in due course.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[Translation]***JOBS AND ECONOMIC GROWTH ACT**

The House resumed from April 13 consideration of the motion that Bill C-9, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 4, 2010 and other measures be read the second time and sent to a committee.

The Speaker: When the bill was being studied in the House on April 13, the hon. member for Verchères—Les Patriotes still had six minutes left for his remarks.

The hon. member for Verchères—Les Patriotes.

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if I have the unanimous consent of my colleagues, I want to take a bit more time. I will not repeat what I said last Tuesday evening at 5:25. I will continue my speech, but if I have additional time at the end, I will be able to say more about various aspects of Bill C-9.

I listened very attentively to the point of order raised by the House Leader of the Bloc Québécois, who pointed out once again all that should be done to ensure that Quebec's constitutional prerogatives are respected here in the House.

Yesterday, the hon. member for Saint-Lambert and the hon. member for Hochelaga jointly introduced a bill that would eliminate the federal spending power to ensure that the jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces are respected. With Bill C-9, the federal government is again infringing on the exclusive jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces.

As our health critic, I am not surprised. At the Standing Committee on Health, hon. members in federalist parties ask certain questions to enhance the federal government's role in health care, even though this is an exclusive jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces.

Some people will say, of course, that when it comes to health care, this is a good thing because it is supposed to help people, cure them and improve their lives. But that is not the point. We should not be asking whether particular measures are wanted or desirable, but whether it is up to the federal government to concern itself with them. My colleagues will have to agree with me that this is clearly not the federal government's role.

In part 22 of Bill C-9 on payments out of the consolidated revenue fund, we see that millions of dollars will be paid to a foundation, a not-for-profit organization, to heal injuries. The question is not whether this should be done, but whether it is the federal government's job to do it. When it comes to health care, we want the federal government to forward all the available money to Quebec and the provinces, which are most able to make wise choices in view of the needs of the people they represent.

We worry when we see the federal government once again disregarding the exclusive jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces and insidiously encroaching on the jurisdiction of health.

And when we listen to the leader of the Liberal Party, their ideas are no better. They want to implement Canada-wide strategies to

block the initiatives that might be introduced by the Government of Quebec.

Part 2 of Bill C-9 implements an enhanced stamping regime for tobacco products. As the health critic, I am pleased to see that measures are being introduced to block measures to increase tobacco product consumption. We were in complete agreement with the government when it introduced Bill C-32 to eliminate flavoured tobacco products and cigarillos. We invite the government to continue down that path and adopt the regulations related to Bill C-32.

• (1040)

As far as stamping tobacco products is concerned, the government has listened to the Bloc Québécois' proposal to implement this marking system, but again, it is not nearly enough.

The government needs to take firm action to block the illegal activities of tobacco smugglers because the measures announced are largely inadequate. In the Bloc Québécois, my colleague responsible for public safety, my colleague responsible for justice, and I are calling on this government to take serious action to stop the growth in smuggling and even eliminate it altogether because if we do not want our youth to have access to cheap tobacco products then we have to address this problem head on.

I will now list a series of measures the Bloc Québécois wants to see the government put forward. It is aware of these measures since we have already talked about them in this House, but I would like to go over them again at this stage since, in part 2 of Bill C-9, the government is introducing a measure that is interesting, but falls far short of what is needed.

My time is up, so this will have to wait, but if the Minister of Public Safety or the Minister of Health would like to hear what I have to say about this, I invite them to contact me directly and I would be pleased to share my thoughts on this with the House another time.

[English]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the member is an expert on health and on the health committee, at which I filled in. I want to ask him a question related to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

There has been a national outcry that it has been closed. There were 134 institutions across the country that provided these excellent services, which were well evaluated by the government, but they were all shut down. The minister's excuse is that the Department of Health could provide those services. The Department of Health was providing those services before, but it was not enough. Obviously these other 134 programs or institutions were needed.

Would the member like to comment further on that?

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Malo: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague very much. Clearly, if he had listened to the Bloc Québécois member, our aboriginal affairs critic, we believe that limiting aboriginal people's access to health care is out of the question. It is appalling, especially knowing—as we heard in the Standing Committee on Health—that some isolated reserves do not even have clean drinking water. How can anyone possibly ensure adequate, effective public health measures in places that do not even have clean drinking water?

The Conservatives need to stop burying their heads in the sand regarding the urgent needs facing Canada's aboriginal people. The federal government is responsible for taking care of these populations. They cannot ignore reality. Concrete action is needed and the hon. member for Yukon is quite right to rise in the House and demand that the government take concrete action. I thank him for that.

•(1045)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I very much enjoyed the member's speech. I must point out that the bill currently before the House of Commons does not really address the priorities of real people across Canada. As the member well knows, the Conservatives seem to want to give billions of dollars and tens of billions of dollars to the banks and big business, instead of investing money in communities across the country. Furthermore, we see that they want to do things like reducing Canada Post's capacities and adopting other measures that do nothing to help Canadian communities.

I wonder if the member found the slightest indication of any priorities in the bill that could improve the daily lives of real people in Canada, or if he believes that the Conservatives are way out in left field.

Mr. Luc Malo: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague. He spoke about what real people would want. There is nothing in this bill for the middle class. How many times has our colleague from Hochelaga risen in this House to tell the government to focus on where the money is?

The banks are putting billions of dollars into tax havens. That is appalling. The money is there. My colleague from Hochelaga did an incredible tour of Quebec and heard from a number of citizens and organizations who really have their priorities straight when it comes to this government's budget. Once again, this federal budget completely ignored the strong measures proposed by the Bloc Québécois.

My NDP colleague mentioned Canada Post. The government wants to put an end to some exclusive privileges of Canada Post and quietly slipped some measures into Bill C-9, without debate, having let Bill C-44 drop. It slipped these measures into Bill C-9. That is completely unacceptable.

[*English*]

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill C-9, the 2010 budget implementation act. It is called the jobs and economic growth act, but that is a bit of a misnomer because there is absolutely nothing in this budget that will create the jobs and the economic growth of the future for Canada. It is

important to consider this budget in the context of the challenges and opportunities that Canada faces in the 21st century.

[*Translation*]

This is not a normal recession, but rather a global economic restructuring. Canada cannot return to where we were before the recession if all the other countries have restructured their economies in order to move forward. We should never waste a good crisis.

[*English*]

We should never waste a good crisis. Throughout history smart companies, smart entrepreneurs, smart governments have used crises to change, to create opportunities. In fact, in Mandarin the word “crisis” is the same word as “opportunity”. Throughout history we have seen intelligent leadership during crises create remarkable wealth for people. That is not what is happening in Canada today. In fact, we are wasting a good crisis.

This budget is another example of the Conservatives' failure to provide any level of vision. While other countries are using their stimulus to make their economies more energy efficient, greener and more competitive in a global carbon-constrained economy, the Conservative government is doing nothing with this visionless budget to address the changing nature of the global economy.

[*Translation*]

The focus should no longer be on environmental responsibility, but increasingly on economic opportunities and energy security. It is very important to make our economy greener and more competitive for the jobs of tomorrow.

•(1050)

[*English*]

At the World Economic Forum in January, everybody from U.S. Republican senators like Lindsey Graham to industry leaders agreed that the new green economy and the clean energy economy is going to become the largest economic growth area of the 21st century. Lindsey Graham actually said, “Six months ago, I was opposed to putting a price on carbon in the United States because I felt it would create a disadvantage with the Chinese economy. Today, I believe that with every day we wait to put a price on carbon in the United States, we are giving the Chinese a head start in the emerging green economy”. That was said by a Republican senator from South Carolina who believes that the time has come in the United States to move forward with a price on carbon and green investments to create a more competitive economy in a global carbon-constrained world.

At Davos this year, France's finance minister, Christine Lagarde, said, “It's a race and whoever wins that race will dominate economic development”. She was speaking of the race for success in the green economy. The Conservative Prime Minister of Canada was the only leader at Davos who was saying that environmental responsibility and measures to address climate change will ultimately hurt the economy.

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Other governments around the world are investing to create competitiveness in the global green economy, but not Canada. South Korea invested 79% of its stimulus into green technologies. This is to create 1.8 million green jobs in the growing sector. China dedicated \$218 billion of its stimulus toward clean environmental technologies. On a per capita basis, the United States has put six times more money into green and clean energy investments than Canada has.

The Conservatives, however, do not look beyond next week's polls. They are so focused on next week's polls that they are ignoring the challenges and opportunities of the coming decades, particularly the opportunities in the green sector. Canada has one of the lowest proportions of green spending in its stimulus package of any OECD country.

In fact, a document from the World Economic Forum entitled, "Green Investing 2010: Policy Mechanisms to Bridge the Financing Gap", lists the investments. In Figure 13, regarding the green investments of various countries, it lists clean energy stimuli by country in 2009, including the U.S., China, South Korea, EU countries, Japan, Spain, Germany, Australia, the U.K., France and Brazil. Canada, with a paltry \$1 billion of investment in clean energy last year, was at the very bottom of that list in terms of investment in green technologies.

If we believe that the opportunities of the future are going to be in the green economy and clean energy and if we are going to fulfill the government's promise of Canada being a clean energy superpower, we have to start making those investments now. The government talks a good game, but unfortunately there is no first-talker advantage, there is only first-mover advantage. Other countries are moving and we are sitting still, and as such, we are falling behind.

Other countries have invested in research and development and innovation. In terms of scientific investment, our stimulus package in Canada has been among the lowest in the industrialized world. The problem is not only are we failing to create the jobs of today in what is effectively a jobless recovery, and it is a statistical recovery but a human recession, but we are not even protecting the jobs of today, let alone creating the jobs of tomorrow.

Almost one in five young Canadians is looking for work. Farmers have been devastated by drops in demand. The forestry industry has all but collapsed. We are leaving many Canadians without their livelihoods. This jobless recovery and human recession is devastating to a lot of Canadians as they hear the government boast of a recovery.

• (1055)

On page 34 of the government's budget, its own figures project that unemployment will continue to rise this year. We need to focus on protecting the jobs of today and creating the jobs of tomorrow.

We need to focus on the three Es: energy, the economy and the environment. We need to make Canada a global clean energy leader. We need to invest in clean conventional energy technology. We need to invest more in technologies like CO₂ sequestration where we have a head start. Forty per cent of the CO₂ stored anywhere in the world is sequestered in Weyburn, Saskatchewan. That was because the previous government, the Martin government, invested alongside the

private sector in the technologies of the future. It put Weyburn on the map as a centre of excellence globally for CO₂ sequestration.

Yet in December when the U.S. signed a deal with the Chinese government on CO₂ sequestration, we were not even at the table. This is an area where we have the best technology and the best example of the implementation of that technology in the world in Saskatchewan and Canada was not at the table when the U.S. and China signed a deal on CO₂ sequestration.

There are other examples of areas where we have a comparative advantage in clean energy technology. In Nova Scotia, for example, the Bay of Fundy has the highest tides in the world. We should be investing to harness those tides as a source of clean energy.

While many ordinary Canadians in fact want the government to provide leadership for the future, the Conservative budget actually looks backward. The fact is there are a number of areas of failure in the budget.

I want to also talk about the importance of healthy communities. Across Canada there is a need for investment in healthy communities.

In my riding we have facilities that are quite aged, for instance, Glooscap District Arena in Canning, Nova Scotia. There is the East Hants Sportsplex in the community of Lantz and the East Hants corridor area which has doubled in population in the last 10 years. There is also the Hants County Exhibition arena in Windsor, the birthplace of hockey no less. We need investments in these important recreational facilities. We cannot have healthy citizens if we do not have healthy community infrastructure.

The province of Nova Scotia has committed \$5 billion to the East Hants Sportsplex. East Hants has committed—

The Deputy Speaker: I have to stop the member there. His time has expired. Questions and comments, the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the statement by the member for Kings—Hants. I enjoy working with him on the international trade committee.

The budget implementation bill is an everything but the kitchen sink bill. The Conservatives have thrown in a whole number of provisions that have no business being in a budget implementation bill. There is everything from legalizing the theft of the employment insurance fund to softwood lumber tariffs. Probably one of the most egregious elements is around Canada Post, and the removal of Canada Post's capacity to serve the public including smaller communities right across the country, as in the member's riding of Kings—Hants in Nova Scotia.

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I would like the member to comment on how inappropriate it is for the Conservatives to throw all of those provisions into a budget bill rather than to have the courage and the honesty to bring those provisions forward one by one so that members of Parliament could evaluate them and vote on them one by one, rather than this deceptive and irresponsible practice.

Could the member comment on that, please.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, the member has identified a real problem with the budget implementation bill and with a lot of legislation that the government puts forward.

The government puts in all kinds of measures that merit individual debate, discussion and ultimately voting on the floor of the House of Commons. It makes it very difficult for the opposition, and in fact members of Parliament in all parties including the Conservative Party, to participate meaningfully in debate, discussion, the crafting of legislation and ultimately the passage of legislation.

I think one of the reasons for the diminution of the role of Parliament has been the fact that the government and the Prime Minister have no respect for Parliament. This budget implementation bill is another example.

• (1100)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was interesting listening to the member's speech because he was able to outline why Canadians, in essence, turned to a new government in 2006. He was outlining many of the failures of the previous government when he talked about the environment. I wonder if he could share with us some of the reasons why it was that the previous government was unable to meet any of its targets with respect to the environment.

He also outlined some of the infrastructure problems in his riding. I note that we have one of the largest infrastructure programs in Canadian history under way. Much of the time, while he was a member under a previous Liberal government, the infrastructure that he talked about was allowed to deteriorate. I wonder if he has some insight as to why the previous government was unable to make its commitments to the environment and why when the Liberals were in government for so long did he allow the infrastructure in his riding to deteriorate so badly?

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, the previous government inherited a \$43 billion deficit from the last Conservative government. The first priority was to eliminate that deficit, such that the Liberal government was able to then make the investments that were important to Canadians, to invest in things like early learning and child care so that all Canadian families would have access to it. Deals signed with all Canadian provinces were annulled and cancelled by the Conservative government.

The member raises the issue of infrastructure in my riding. I want to talk about the importance of recreational infrastructure. The fact is that in the East Hants Sportsplex we have the provincial government of Nova Scotia committing \$5.6 million and \$3.5 million committed by the municipality of Hants East. It is time for the federal government to stand up and invest in this important project, the East Hants Sportsplex.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government seems to be either biased or very discriminatory when it comes to infrastructure or RInC applications. In my riding the Greek community has been snowed out. Could the member elaborate on why the Conservatives are being biased? Also, regarding carbon capture technology, what is the government's investment in comparison to other countries?

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that when families in Canning, Nova Scotia, whose children play hockey, need probably a couple of hundred thousand dollars invested in the Glooscap District Arena for upgrades so that it can continue to operate, people should not have to see their tax dollars invested in megaprojects elsewhere when all they need is an investment to keep that rink open. The fact is the partisanship of the investments of the government is absolutely offensive because all Canadian taxpayers deserve—

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-9, the budget implementation bill. The misnomer of course is the subtitle, which is "Jobs and Economic Growth Act". I think a number of speakers from this corner of the House, from the NDP, have pointed out how inappropriate that term is, given that the current government has absolutely no fundamental economic approach, no industrial policy, and no real attempt to create jobs and prosperity for the middle class. What the government loves to do, as members well know, is just shovel money off the back of a truck to bankers and the richest of Canada's CEOs. That is the government's attempt at economy policy.

In this corner of the House we actually believe in sound economics and a fundamentally economic approach that includes an industrial policy, that includes building export markets abroad by providing the same supports that our competitors are providing to their export industries. So, we have different approaches.

I would like to say that Canadian values and Canadians are much closer to where the NDP is going than what the Conservatives are offering in this budget implementation bill.

As I mentioned previously, this should be called the "everything but the kitchen sink act" because what the government has done is thrown in a whole range of inappropriate measures into this bill.

Is this in keeping with where Canadians want to go? Of course not.

Do Canadians want to see Canada Post gutted in its ability to provide services across the country? Of course not.

Do Canadians want to see punitive softwood tariffs imposed that would hit the provinces of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec? Of course not.

This would force more mill closures and more job losses. We had the softwood sellout that killed 20,000 jobs across the country. The budget implementation bill would continue that tradition among the Conservative government budgets and policies of killing our softwood jobs in this country.

Government Orders

What this bill would also do is legalize the employment insurance theft that took place. This is \$57 billion of money that was taken from Canada's middle class, Canada's workers, by the former Liberal government, a practice continued by the Conservative government. This was money that Canadians paid into an employment insurance account as an insurance policy against loss of wages.

Yet, what this budget implementation bill would do is legalize that theft. It is quite simple. It is as if we rob a bank and then afterward we change the law to say that robbing banks is okay. Well, robbing the employment insurance fund was robbing Canadians, robbing unemployed Canadians. For the Conservatives to offer the legalization, the retroactive legalization of this theft, whether it occurred under the former Liberal government or the current Conservative government, is equally inappropriate. I believe Canadians will punish the Conservatives when they get the opportunity to voice their disapproval on what is a fundamentally irresponsible and dishonest act.

What this bill would also do is centralize control in Ottawa the environmental assessment process. We have seen this with other Conservative ministries. We have seen how the Conservatives have tried to centralize control in Ottawa, that growing sense of entitlement of the Conservative government. We have certainly seen it perhaps most particularly just in the actions of the last few weeks.

However, the centralization of control, putting into the hands of very few people, or one or two ministers, the ability to determine whether or not the environment is protected in various parts of the country, again, is something that conflicts with basic Canadian values. Canadians are a fair people. Canadians want to see increased protection of the environment, not decreased protection.

What this budget bill would do, the everything but the kitchen sink bill thrown in, in addition to all of these other measures put into this completely inappropriate omnibus bill, is simply allow the Minister of the Environment to dictate the scope of environmental assessments or whether they even occur at all.

● (1105)

For my province of British Columbia, perhaps the worst aspect of this budget implementation bill is that it would compound the incredibly unfair redistribution of taxes through the HST. In my province of British Columbia, HST is a hated word, an epitaph. The B.C. Liberal government is on the retreat and desperately falling in the polls because of what it has done. What it has done is restructured taxes. It has given corporate CEOs another free ride, and it is saying to the average family in British Columbia that it is going to pay \$2,000 more a year to supplement this tax-free ride that is being given to the corporate bigwigs.

It is \$2,000 at a time when British Columbia has been hard hit by incredibly inappropriate economic policies, both by the Conservative government and also by the B.C. Liberals. To force B.C. families to pay \$2,000 more out of pocket so that corporate bigwigs can have an even longer tax-free holiday is absolutely inappropriate.

What we have seen over the last few days shows the willingness of British Columbians to fight back. In places like the Peace River Country, which is certainly not a hotbed of the NDP, we have had

hundreds of British Columbians lining up to sign the referendum question, basically a petition to force a referendum on the HST. Those names have been coming in so quickly that Peace River is virtually finished in meeting the threshold to force that referendum.

In places like Delta, we have had 1,000 people out at community meetings. Right across the province, Vancouver Island, the Okanagan, and the lower mainland, we are seeing a record level of support to sign the petition to force the referendum and to force back the federal Conservatives from their incredibly unfair attempt to give corporate bigwigs a tax-free holiday and force ordinary British Columbians to pay more.

The budget implementation bill just compounds that problem by enlarging the HST into other areas like financial services. It is like the Conservatives have completely lost the ability to understand British Columbians. They just do not listen to British Columbians anymore. As far as the Conservatives are concerned, as we heard from one of the budget speeches that was made by the Conservatives, Canada basically ended at the Rocky Mountains.

That inability to understand British Columbians and their belief in having a fair tax system, and their abhorrence of unfair redistribution of taxes to penalize the average B.C. family \$2,000 while giving corporate bigwigs a tax-free holiday, is something that will cost the Conservatives quite dearly whenever that next election occurs. Whether it is this spring or next fall or next year, there is no doubt British Columbians will punish the Conservatives for refusing to listen to them.

In the meantime, British Columbians are lining up to sign the petition. There is no doubt we will see a referendum in British Columbia that will cut the HST.

The B.C. Liberals have been pointing their fingers at the federal Conservatives and saying that if the HST bill is not passed in the B. C. Legislature, the Conservatives are going to doubly punish British Columbians. I would just caution the Conservatives. British Columbians are already fed up. They are angry enough at Conservatives.

If the idea of the federal Conservative government is that it is going to punish British Columbians and make them pay more if this bill does not pass the Legislature, I would say that they will see a degree of anger and rage against these federal Conservatives that has never been seen before in British Columbia.

I would be inclined to say every single Conservative seat in British Columbia would be put in jeopardy if the Conservatives are foolish enough to threaten British Columbians by saying that it is going to impose an additional 5% PST on top of this 12% HST unless the bill is passed in the Legislature. That is a warning that I think all British Columbians will be delivering to Conservatives in these coming days.

With all of these inappropriate measures, given what Canadians and British Columbians are living through, there is no doubt that the strong B.C. caucus of federal New Democrats will be voting against this budget implementation bill. It does nothing to address the fundamental economic challenges that we are facing and nothing to help the middle class in British Columbia and elsewhere in Canada.

Government Orders

•(1110)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member would comment on the process for a minute, getting away from content and into a wider vision of process. He made a good comment about process, what obviously should not be illegitimate in the budget implementation bill, just like last year with the Navigable Waters Protection Act and pay equity, where the government did the same trick.

The member is quite experienced on another process issue. In a normal government situation, policy would come from expert bureaucrats. The government would take that policy and make bills. It then would have programs evaluated and spend a lot of money for the purpose of seeing whether the programs should go on.

However, it is backwards with the current government. The recommendations coming up, for instance, from the experts in justice are totally ignored in its crime bills. It does the exact opposite of what its officials are recommending. When it gets excellent evaluations for programs, such as the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and the Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmospheric Sciences, the government shuts these two programs down in this budget, laying off all those experts who are doing great work. That is a great economic action plan.

Would the member like to comment on the process of the government?

•(1115)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, that is the fundamental problem that we are seeing with the Conservative government.

The member for Yukon may disagree with me on this but I believe that the Liberals were thrown out of government because of corruption and their inability to respond to ordinary Canadians across the country.

The Conservatives made a series of promises that they promptly broke. One of their fundamental promises was transparency and due process in Parliament, and they have completely betrayed Canadians who voted for them on that basis.

We are seeing as many scandals as we saw under the former Liberal government but, arguably, the Conservatives are much worse when it comes to secrecy, central control and the inability to provide for access to information. The Information Commissioner has given them an F on access to information, and that was one of the fundamental promises that the Prime Minister made when he was elected to government.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been hearing a lot throughout this debate from the Liberals about why they were such a failure in government, all the policies they were unable to enact, why they were so unsuccessful as a government and why Canadians ultimately turned to a new government that would cut taxes, invest in Canadians' priorities and focus on jobs and the economy.

We have also been hearing throughout this debate a lot of the policies that the extreme left-wing coalition opposite would have introduced had they ever gotten the opportunity to govern in this country.

I wonder, though, if he could shed some insight into why his Liberal-led coalition partners are actually voting in favour of this budget and other budgets and why they continue to allow our good government to do what Canadians want, which is to focus on the economy and jobs. If, as they have been saying, things are so bad, why would they be voting in favour of it?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I will not comment on the Liberals voting for this budget and supporting and propping up the Conservatives over the last four years. Canadians have already cast their judgment on the Liberal Party, which is why it has collapsed in the polls and why it is non-existent west of Toronto. Canadians have had their say.

What I would like to do is respond to the comments about the Conservative government being good. He used the word "extreme", which is very appropriate in describing the Conservative government. The Conservative government, yes indeed, is extreme, extreme in its betrayal of the fundamental promises it made about transparency and respecting democracy, and extreme in its sense of entitlement.

The NDP had to stop the Minister of National Defence from taking a \$100,000 joyride to Vancouver when commercial flights were available. If the NDP had not intervened, \$100,000 would have been splurged on a 10-hour joyride. We have seen that sense of entitlement from other ministers as well. Some of the ministers have had to resign and some ministers should resign. The Conservative government is an extreme government.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I join the debate on Bill C-9, the Jobs and Economic Growth Act, which should really be called the Budget Implementation Act. This bill is about implementing the last budget. Since the Bloc was against the budget, it is against this bill on jobs and economic growth, or rather this budget implementation bill. The name has been changed to give the impression that something is actually happening and something new is being put on the table.

There are many reasons for our position. One need only think of the manufacturing and forestry industries, successful industries in Quebec, which are being left to their own devices. Jobs could have been saved in many regions where there have been layoffs and plant closures. For five years these industries had been asking the government to take action and help them so they can purchase new equipment or harvest the forest differently, for example. The manufacturing industry was also faced with having to restructure companies.

The government therefore released the amount of \$170 million, but what shocked us is that it was able to find \$10 billion for the automotive industry. The forestry industry, which is an important industry in Quebec, was thus suffering, since the \$170 million had to serve the forestry industry all across Canada. We are really talking about crumbs here. The lack of sensitivity toward Quebec was obvious; nothing was done to save this industry. Yet for the automotive industry there was no problem, and they could find the money, that \$10 billion, to save it.

Government Orders

One need only think of another priority: equalization. The Prime Minister made a commitment in the 2005-06 campaign to change the equalization formula, and in particular, not to do so unilaterally. But he did the opposite. The change he made to the equalization formula created a shortfall for Quebec. The loss was \$1 billion for last year alone, and every year it will grow by \$350 million.

So we have reasons not to vote in favour of this budget implementation bill. These are not small amounts. Added up, they total billions of dollars. Quebec finds itself left out of this government's priorities.

Furthermore, the calculation of equalization for Quebec takes account of the revenues of Hydro-Québec, yet the calculation for Ontario does not take account of the revenues of Hydro One. There, once again, is the double standard. The automotive industry has favoured Ontario. To repeat, calculation of equalization for Quebec takes account of the revenues of Hydro-Québec, but in the case of Ontario, it does not take account of the revenues of Hydro One. The effect of this is to increase the relative wealth of Quebec and decrease its equalization payment. For Quebec, the shortfall in this regard comes to \$250 million per year. How does this government explain this double standard?

Harmonization of the sales tax is another reason to vote against this bill. Here too, the policy of the double standard prevails. Whereas Ontario, British Columbia and the three Atlantic provinces were compensated for harmonizing their provincial sales tax with the GST, the government refuses to do the same for Quebec. The amount of this compensation is \$2.2 billion per year. The Conservative government alleges that there has been no harmonization. Many questions have been asked in the House. The Bloc Québécois has been very persistent on this demand for compensation, but it always receives the same response.

Yet, certain documents recognized that the Quebec sales tax and the GST had been harmonized. Then, all of a sudden, this process was no longer called harmonization. The QST and the GST were harmonized in 1992, and a unanimous motion was passed by the Quebec National Assembly. As I mentioned earlier, in its 2006 budget, the Conservative government itself recognized that the QST and the GST had been harmonized.

• (1120)

This was recognized in the 2006 budget but now that the time has come to deliver the goods and give the money to Quebec—particularly considering that the government did it for other provinces—it no longer wants to give back to Quebec what it is entitled to for harmonizing its tax with the GST.

The government has changed its mind. It refuses to compensate Quebec to the tune of \$2.2 billion, because it is trying to put pressure on Quebec so that Canada will collect the harmonized tax itself. But Quebec has been doing it since 1992. This is nothing less than blackmailing Quebec taxpayers, who are being asked to tighten their belt. But the fact is that this money is owed to Quebec. This is another reason why we voted against the budget.

As for the environment, we are nowhere near making the green shift. We are well aware that the Prime Minister's performance in Copenhagen was mediocre. Instead of behaving like the leader of a

country that seeks to be a model and encourage other nations to follow its example, this government has decided to contribute to the wealth of oil companies and to oil sands development in Alberta. Again, this is happening at Quebec's expense.

As I mentioned, the government's last budget provides \$1 billion for the nuclear industry, compared to \$51 million for a few tepid environmental measures. As we know, the nuclear industry is primarily located in Ontario, not in Quebec.

We can see that the choices made by this government do not allow Quebec to develop at an adequate pace.

Moreover, there is nothing in the budget to help reduce greenhouse gases at the source. However, there is a lot for oil companies, through tax benefits and also the absence of a carbon tax.

The Bloc would also have liked to see in the budget a recognition or compensation program for industries that have made efforts to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions, including Quebec industries, such as its manufacturing industry which has reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by 24%.

The Bloc proposed many other measures for the environment, such as allocating \$500 million, over five years, to a fund for green energy initiatives, and developing a plan to promote electric cars and the electrification of transportation. Obviously, we are talking about huge investments of billions of dollars.

Preference has also been given to tax havens. This budget very certainly does not do what was announced to combat tax havens. That was also something the Bloc Québécois had called for. The government is engaging in double talk. On the one hand, it says it wants to tackle tax havens, and on the other hand, it uses this bill to open loopholes in the Income Tax Act to allow corporations not registered in Canada not to pay their fair share of tax. That is a double standard. We would have liked to see a second recovery plan in this budget, to get the economy going. There is nothing in this budget that suggests that the right decisions have been made.

The Conservatives have decided to eliminate tax withholding for certain non-resident corporations that sell their assets in Canada, which many experts in the field say will open the door wide to tax evasion. So this facilitates tax evasion.

We know that that there are also some corporations that use tax havens to avoid tax. The figures from the auditor general tell us that corporations would save as much as \$600 million a year by doing business in tax havens.

The Bloc Québécois therefore urges the government to stop talking and start acting, instead of proposing pseudo-solutions made up of empty words as the Conservatives are doing. The Bloc Québécois has been proposing concrete solutions since 2005 to do away with access to tax havens like Barbados and eliminate the double deduction of interest.

Government Orders

The government has done nothing in this regard and it is plain that the bill confirms the Conservative government's desire to protect rich taxpayers at all costs, among which we find the banks and big corporations. This shows contempt for workers in our industries, including the forestry industry, which are experiencing hard times in Quebec. Right when those industries need help the most, they are not offered a hand.

We could also talk about the reduction and elimination of positions in the government. The adjustments made are merely cosmetic. A large majority of the positions they said they want to eliminate, 90%, had been vacant for several years.

• (1125)

So it is ridiculous to offer to reduce positions that have been vacant for several years. The measures proposed by the Conservative government to cut operating costs in the federal bureaucracy are very insignificant, when we compare them to the stringent recommendations made by the Bloc Québécois.

We had proposed some \$5.4 billion in savings per year. There are several reasons for this, and I think they are justified.

We held consultations across Quebec and our new finance critic, the member for Hochelaga, also heard other suggestions. Numerous people told us we were not heading in the right direction.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a friendly question and request for the member. Bill C-9 enables a voluntary code of guidelines regarding credit cards and debit cards. The government is constantly siding with big banks and big business against consumers.

Canada's first air passengers' bill of rights was opposed by all the Conservatives, who are more interested in protecting the interests of Air Transat and Air Canada. All opposition parties, the Bloc, the NDP and the Liberals, voted for the bill at second reading. However, at the transport committee, the Bloc critic turned against Quebec consumers, and he is now supporting the Conservatives to kill the bill.

I know most of the Bloc members are very progressive in their outlook politically. Could the member investigate why the Bloc critic has turned his back on Quebec air passengers and sided with the Conservatives? I think that would be very helpful, because I thought we had a very good understanding with all three opposition parties supporting the bill. Something went wrong at committee, and I am very curious to know why it happened.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, by voting against the budget implementation bill today, the Bloc is reflecting the entire population's disappointment with this budget that does nothing for ordinary people. It is a budget primarily for the richest people, the banks and big business.

The Bloc is watching very closely. The context of committee discussions must also be watched. I was not there, but we study each and every decision that is made in committee or by the parties. Quebec's political will must also be considered.

If the Bloc members feel that a measure is advantageous for Quebec, they will often vote with the Liberals or the New Democrats or the government. We are not dogmatic. We are realists when it comes to Quebec's situation, which we know so well.

We also present the unanimous consensus of the National Assembly on a number of issues. So I cannot respond to the member right now, but I am sure that my colleague, the transport critic, has studied this issue. We have to look at the details of the proposed measures.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague gave an excellent speech. She said that the Bloc Québécois cannot vote in favour of the budget. She gave the example of the more than \$10 billion provided to the automobile industry, which is highly concentrated in Ontario. She added that a measly \$170 million was given to the forestry industry, which is a fundamental part of the Quebec nation.

The Conservative government has recognized the Quebec nation, but not in a concrete way. It was recognized, but only in words. It is absurd that the budget does nothing for the numerous single-industry municipalities and villages that depend on forestry. The budget does nothing to help this industry either.

I would like my colleague to comment on this.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague.

Indeed, it is absurd and very shocking that the Conservatives, who promised to be fair to Quebec and who recognized the Quebec nation, would present an empty shell. It makes no sense; it is absurd.

The \$10 billion they managed to find for the auto industry is 57 times more than the \$170 million invested in the forestry industry. They found \$10 billion, but Quebec receives a pittance. It is ridiculous. They recognized the Quebec nation, but what does that mean—

• (1135)

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate.

The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis.

[*English*]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I was studying the budget document in preparation for this speech, like others in the House, I found that the title is a bit of a misnomer. The title reading "Leading the Way on Jobs and Growth" perhaps should be, in my opinion, "Missed Opportunities: Letting Others Take the Lead". That would more appropriately describe this budget.

Government Orders

The reason I say that is that the budget is a missed opportunity to begin or, in some cases, continue laying the groundwork for solutions to many of the problems we face today and will face in the future. As my main area of interest as a member of the environment committee is water policy, I of course look at the budget through the lens of water. A good starting point in terms of comparing the weaknesses of this document to what it could have been would be to look at the Ontario throne speech, which was delivered only a few short days ago and which, contrary to the throne speech that was delivered here on Parliament Hill on March 3, has only half as many words yet says so much more. Let me read a few lines from that throne speech:

As part of its Open Ontario Plan, your government will introduce legislation that will build on Ontario's expertise in clean water technology.

The Water Opportunities Act would lay the foundation for new Ontario jobs and make our province the North American leader in the development and sale of new technologies and services for water conservation and treatment.

The Conference Board of Canada estimates the global market for water technology at more \$400 billion US per year—and doubling every five to six years.

The question becomes: Why do the federal budget and the throne speech that preceded it not include visionary statements such as that? The reason is that the government does not believe in vision. It believes that vision is Liberal philosophy's evil twin and therefore does not think in visionary terms. When we do not think in visionary terms, we miss opportunities. There are things staring at us that we cannot see, and that is the problem when we do not have a vision.

Here is an example of how the government has eschewed the whole notion of vision. I presented a motion in the House a few years ago calling on the government to create a national water strategy. Now if the government were thinking in terms of a national water strategy, it would see the opportunities for actions like those the government of Ontario has mentioned in its throne speech. The motion passed because I guess many of the members on the government side did not feel they could look their constituents in the eye if they voted against such an obvious and important motion.

However, that was three years ago, and on the government's website today there is no national water strategy. There is a PDF file called "Federal Water Policy", but if we click on that file, we see that the national water policy is the Pearse report that was commissioned in 1987 by the Mulroney government. As a metaphor for the way the government looks backward, just go and look at the website and see that it has posted as its national water policy a task force report from 1987. I think that says a lot.

The budget also forgot to mention the St. Lawrence River, which is one of the 15 largest waterways in the world. Its watershed occupies one-third of the territory of the province of Quebec. About 40% of Quebec's municipalities draw their drinking water from the river, and more than 75% of Quebec's industrial facilities, including its large hydroelectric plants, are located on the St. Lawrence River. Finally, the St. Lawrence valley contains 70% of Quebec's population, yet we do not hear a word about the St. Lawrence River. Why is it particularly important in March 2010 that the budget mention the St. Lawrence River?

• (1140)

It is because the fourth installment of the St. Lawrence action plan, which extended from 2005 to 2010, ended on March 31, 2010, and

there is still nothing to replace it. It is one of the most important rivers in the world, one of the most important rivers in Canada and North America, and the government has not even begun to think about extending the St. Lawrence action plan. That is what happens when we do not have a visionary mindset. We do not see the obvious, and that is very unfortunate.

The budget also will give extraordinary powers to the Minister of the Environment to undermine environmental assessments in Canada. Let me give the House a bit of background on this.

There is a practice going on, especially in northern mining communities, where mining companies, to save money, instead of building impoundment areas for mine tailings, take those mine tailings and dump them in freshwater lakes, thereby killing the lakes. This has been permitted by part of the metal mining effluent regulations, which allow a mine to be listed on schedule 2 and therefore be given permission to use a lake basically as a tailings pond.

Ever since the government took power, the number of mines that have been added to this list has exploded, while the opposite has happened in the United States. One of the first things the Obama administration did was to put on hold some 200 coal mining permits from companies that wanted to dump waste in streams and wetlands. While the Obama administration is protecting its water bodies, in Canada the government is rushing to destroy them, and that is really unfortunate.

The solution to that would be to make environmental assessments stronger. In the past when a project went to a federal department for environmental assessment, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans in this case, it would split up the project into different pieces and then it would do a cursory assessment of each piece. If the project were looked at as a whole, a much more comprehensive assessment, maybe even a panel assessment, would be needed. But officials in the Department of Fisheries and Oceans were not doing that. They were in fact undermining the principles of environmental assessment.

What happened? About a month ago some environmental groups took the government to the Supreme Court of Canada and won. How did the government respond to that? In the budget it gave the Minister of the Environment the legal power to basically reverse that Supreme Court decision. The minister would now have the power to define the scope of a project. The minister can now do what fisheries officials were doing before. This was found to be against the spirit and the letter of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act when the Supreme Court looked at the issue.

Now we have a government that is going to make sure mining companies can still use freshwater lakes as dumping grounds for toxic mine tailings, and that is an awful development. I hope more attention will be given to that by environmental groups that are already doing good work on trying to underscore this problem and also by the media and other parliamentarians.

Government Orders

The budget mentioned the government would be investing in a RADARSAT project called the RADARSAT Constellation Mission, which is essentially a process for linking up satellites. That is all fine and well, but the government has been dragging its feet with respect to RADARSAT on another issue, a water issue.

Ducks Unlimited, in partnership with Environment Canada and the Canadian Space Agency, had begun phase one of what is called the Canadian wetlands inventory. This is a project to map all of Canada's wetlands. The reason it is important is that Canada contains about 25% of the world's wetlands, more than any other country in the world. Wetlands are very important to us. They are an essential part of the hydrological cycle. This project had begun but was then starved of funding by Environment Canada, so it never went beyond the point of establishing the methodology for mapping Canada's wetlands.

• (1145)

Why did the government not take the opportunity in the budget to mention that it would relaunch this project and that it would fund phase two? This is an extremely important issue, especially in the oil sands. Last week we found out that the oil sands companies now say that they cannot afford to restore the wetlands they are destroying even though they previously made commitments to do so.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw on the extensive parliamentary experience of the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis, who has much more experience than I do. He has heard many political speeches, dealt with many strategies and listened to members on all sides of the House.

I listen to the speeches given by some of his colleagues and find them very interesting. I even agree with them in some cases. I know the Liberals are speaking out against the budget, but will vote to support it. I probably do not have enough political experience to understand that contradiction. They see that this budget is really bad, which is why we will be voting against it, but they are incapable of bringing down the government.

I really have to wonder about this. Perhaps my colleague can draw on his political experience and enlighten me.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, I would be pleased to enlighten my colleague and I welcome him to the House of Commons.

He is incorrect when he says that the Liberal opposition voted in favour of the budget. We voted against the budget.

I would like to remind the hon. member that the parties that come into power, here in Parliament, are parties that have principles and that listen to the public. If we want the power, we have to listen to the public. The public was quite clear in telling us that now is not the time for an election. That gives the Liberal opposition time to prepare to take power eventually. It gives our party time to develop Canada-wide strategies and visions to offer to all Canadians in the next election.

To answer my colleague's question more specifically, I would add that a number of the measures in the current budget will be overturned by a more enlightened Liberal government.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again we are in our third day of speeches on an 880 page omnibus bill, which has a number of measures that do not belong to it, and not one government member has spoken to it. The debate is just among the opposition parties. We are not debating the government. We cannot ask the government questions on aspects of the bill. We have a lot of background notes that need clarification, but there is nobody here to answer for the government.

The Liberals say that they will vote against the bill, but not in sufficient numbers to defeat the government. The other day, their postal critic talked about how important it was to stop the remailer issue, which the Conservatives have tried to get through the House over the last couple of years, under Bill C-14 and Bill C-44, but have been unable to do. They knew they could not get it through the minority Parliament, so they dumped it into this bill, where it does not belong. It has nothing to do with the budget. They are basically defying us to defeat them and have an election.

How can the Liberals defend the issue of postal remailers knowing full well—

The Deputy Speaker: I am going to have to stop the member there to allow the member for Lac-Saint-Louis enough time to respond.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, the member is correct in the sense that the government should be putting up speakers. It is a sign of disrespect for our parliamentary democracy that it has not done so. Is the member surprised by this disrespect for our national Parliament?

We just came back from six weeks of prorogation, where the people were denied a voice through their elected representations so the Prime Minister could attend the Olympics and try to avoid some difficult issues, which are still dogging him.

I also remind the hon. member that we do not get much better answers in question period. One wonders if having the government debating us would really add much to the conversation. At least we have the opportunity to raise issues like the ones the hon. member has raised and the ones I have tried to raise in my speech.

Government Orders

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am going to start by digressing for a moment to respond to the answer that the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis gave to the question posed by my colleague from Hochelaga. When asked how they could possibly not vote in sufficient numbers to defeat this bill, he said the Liberals needed more time to prepare an alternative to the government. It is true the Liberals have only been in the opposition for four years and it takes them a lot of time to prepare alternative plans. It does not take us that long, though, in the Bloc Québécois. Every year when a budget is about to be tabled, we draw up a presentation. We bring our ideas forward in the context of a serious, credible budget. This year, it was done brilliantly by no other than our colleague from Hochelaga. That goes to show there is no need to sit around for four years on the opposition benches in order to present alternatives.

Turning to the budget, I want to say a few words today on environmental issues. Next April 22 is Earth Day. It is a good opportunity to look at what there is in the budget for the environment, or unfortunately, what there is not. We cannot ignore the fact that this government has no vision at all when it comes to the environment. There is not the least desire to make Canada a country where the environment is taken seriously, with all the consequences this obviously entails for future generations as well as for Quebec from an economic standpoint. I will return to this point later.

First, we should remember what the issue is here. The Conservatives often say we should not bring too many environmental measures forward or fight too hard against greenhouse gases because it could harm the economy. I will come back to that later because I think this claim is utterly false. Quite to the contrary, we have an incredible economic opportunity here, especially in Quebec.

Even if they were right, we are talking about our planet. We are talking about the future. We are talking about what we will leave to our children and grandchildren. They say that if we are not able, especially under a Conservative government, to meet the economic challenges involved, we should not take any chances and should continue to pollute and degrade the environment to the point where we would leave our grandchildren a very sad planet indeed. It is shameful. It is hardly surprising, though, given that many members of this government, former Reformers, simply do not believe the science of climate change, starting with the Prime Minister himself. He even said that Kyoto was a socialist plot without any basis in reality.

We still see this regularly in the comments of various members. Recently the member for Beauce, with his party's support, even wrote to the Quebec media to say that this was alarmist, that that these predictions of global warming could not hold up, and that by way of precaution—I see that you agree, Mr. Speaker, that it is a little shameful to say this—what ought to be done is nothing. By way of precaution, in case the predictions of almost all the scientists are wrong, let us do nothing. If they are wrong, we will have done nothing. Obviously this is totally ridiculous. It is the opposite of the precautionary principle, which says that when you are in doubt, refrain; when in doubt, make sure you do the right thing.

In the end, we have a government that does not believe in science. Personally, I trust the scientists and the scientific consensus. The only scientific statement that I am starting to doubt is the statement that dinosaurs are extinct, because from the behaviour of the Conservatives one has the impression that there continue to be quite a few dinosaurs on this planet.

Second, I would say that even though the environmental challenges facing us are substantial, they also represent a substantial economic opportunity. For Quebec, in any case, this is clear. Oil and the oil economy that Canada is developing are weakening and impoverishing Quebec.

• (1155)

There are various mechanisms to explain this: for example, the upward pressure on the Canadian dollar caused by exploitation of the oil sands. Every time the price of oil goes up, people have to procure more Canadian dollars to buy oil in Alberta, thereby creating an artificial increase in the value of our dollar. This has an impact on Quebec's manufacturing industry, which is a major source of exports. Since the dollar costs more to buy abroad, the products we export cost more and we become less competitive. Far from making us richer, this situation is making us poorer and weakening us economically.

In general, this is not very complicated. Every time a barrel of oil enters Quebec, money leaves Quebec, making us poorer. Let us be clear that the oil is not coming from Alberta. People sometimes say that if we are not nice to Alberta, they will cut off our oil supply. However Quebec does not get its oil supply from Alberta, but from the Middle East.

If we fill up at a service station, we do not get richer, we get poorer. That is the same thing. The federal government's refusal to put measures in place to reduce our consumption of oil makes us poorer still.

The government of Quebec has some latitude, but there are things that can only be done at the federal level. The lack of such measures is preventing us from moving toward a petroleum-free economy.

What measures could be introduced? One would be carbon exchanges, which are starting to crop up in countries around the world. In a carbon exchange system, companies, countries, governments and institutions that exceed their emission reduction targets can sell greenhouse gas emission credits to others that fall short of their targets. This sort of system rewards effort and penalizes lack of effort and would open up attractive economic opportunities for Canadian companies.

There are not even any tax benefits to offset Quebec's economic weakness. A few weeks ago, the media said that we should not complain too much about the Alberta oil sands, because that is what funds equalization payments for Quebec to make up for its lack of revenues. But one cannot say that anymore, for the simple reason that it is not true.

Because of the way oil resources are treated, 50% of revenue is excluded from the equalization calculation, which is very favourable treatment indeed.

Government Orders

I would like to read an excerpt from Mr. Bachand's most recent budget. I am not going to criticize his budget, because you do not kick a man when he is down, but it does contain some interesting points:

As a result of the caps imposed on the equalization program in November 2008, Québec will receive \$8 552 million in 2010-2011, whether or not Alberta's oil sands are included in the program.

This means that even if the tap were shut off tomorrow morning and oil sands development in Alberta came to a halt—which the Bloc Québécois obviously is not suggesting—Quebec would receive the same equalization payments.

It is therefore wrong to say that oil sands revenue funds equalization for Quebec. And it is not the evil separatists who are saying so, but the staunchly federalist government of Jean Charest in Quebec City.

In conclusion, I do not believe that this policy would be any different under the Liberals. The Leader of the Opposition has gone on record as supporting oil sands development. That will always be the case in Canada, because a country defends its interests. The problem is that the interests of Canada and Quebec are once again different. Ultimately, the solution is for Quebec to become a sovereign nation. Then, Canadians will keep on defending their interests and Quebecers can defend their own environmental and economic interests.

• (1200)

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate some of the comments on the environment, which is what I would like to ask the member about.

I do not know if he remembers, but when we were children, or at least when I was a child a long time ago, there was a game where we would take a little step forward and a giant step backward.

The member has probably asked the government questions on the environment. The government will respond by giving examples of a couple of things it has done which are little steps forward, but it has taken giant steps backward.

I wonder if the member could comment on some of the programs the government has actually cancelled for these giant steps backward.

My other question relates to the government's cancellation of the funding for the scientists at the Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmospheric Sciences. I will not use the term “dinosaur”; I will not be as pejorative as that, but the government must be living in the dark ages to cancel funding for scientists in Canada who are studying climate change and drought. This work is very important for farmers. It is closing the PEARL station, which is the northernmost station, which will hinder Canadian sovereignty. Weather and temperature records are very important to the functioning of any country in the world. It is bizarre that the government would cancel this entire foundation. Now all the scientists across Canada will have to go to the United States and elsewhere and we will not have the data.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether calling the Conservatives dinosaurs is more insulting to the Conservatives or to the dinosaurs. That remains to be seen.

I will answer the question regarding programs that encourage people to reduce energy consumption. These programs are effective. In fact, some have been cancelled because they were extremely effective and the demand was too great. I want to stress that they were working. It is a good sign when these programs are popular.

I recently converted to a geothermal heating system, which uses the energy in the ground for heating in winter and for cooling in summer. This is a very efficient system. Government grants helped me to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Such programs benefit society and help our country reach its objectives. As an individual, I also benefit by reducing my heating costs.

It was unfortunately these types of future oriented programs, which benefit everyone, that got cancelled. That is unfortunate. I hope they will be restored as quickly as possible.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a friendly request for the member. As he knows, the Bloc, the Liberals and the NDP all supported Bill C-310, the air passengers' bill of rights, but when it got to the transport committee, the Bloc critic, the member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, basically turned against Quebec air travellers and joined forces with the Conservatives and recommended that the bill not be proceeded with. I know that most Bloc members are very progressive people, so I was quite surprised by this development.

I would like to ask the member whether he would investigate why his party's critic joined the Conservatives and effectively attempted to kill the bill. It still has to be dealt with in Parliament and I just want to make certain that all members are aware of what actually happened at the committee.

If he would investigate this, that would be a very positive step.

• (1205)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Mr. Speaker, this is not the first time that my colleague from Elmwood—Transcona, who is very active in the House, has asked me questions during a debate.

It is also not the first time that he has asked a question that has nothing to do with my comments. I know that this is a very important matter for him, but out of respect for voters and those who place their trust in me, I will not comment on a discussion that took place in a committee in which I had no part. I am certain that he will understand, as would any member, that we are trying to stick to the topic at hand.

I am out of time and cannot elaborate further on the previous question but I will have other opportunities to do so.

Government Orders

[English]

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, here we are having returned to the House. We have had a throne speech. We have had a budget announcement, and now we are discussing the budget implementation bill. Like other budgets before it, I was hopeful about this budget. I was hopeful that it would be bold and visionary and that it would actually steer Canada toward a position of strength, but unfortunately, like other budgets, I was left disappointed.

The piece I am maybe the most disappointed with is the disconnect between the throne speech and the budget. In the throne speech, we actually saw some pretty interesting language about an innovation and productivity agenda. That really caught my eye. I was pretty excited about that language, but to even take that language at face value, we would have to ignore recent history.

If we just think about the Nortel experience very recently, the government essentially allowed Nortel to collapse before our very eyes. That company did the bulk of private sector research and development. It made Canada a leader in telecommunications. We just stood by and watched it fold and watched all of that research, all of that knowledge, all of that innovation get bought up by other countries.

That knowledge was our knowledge. That knowledge is our knowledge and now it is gone. If we add to that the fact that the government has utterly failed at least to try to protect the pensions of those knowledge-based workers, it does not bode well for any future innovation and productivity agenda the government purports to have.

Despite that recent example, in thinking about the future I was still optimistic about this productivity and innovation agenda. If we think about how best to accomplish that agenda, the moment was the stimulus budget and it was another lost opportunity. Innovation requires basic infrastructure such as broadband Internet access and investments in energy infrastructure. Last year's stimulus budget was the perfect time to invest in those infrastructure basics. It would have created jobs. It would have laid the groundwork for a real innovation and productivity agenda, but the government did not act then and this budget actually makes things worse.

The government's strategy is not to build infrastructure but actually to deregulate. Deregulation has proven to stifle innovation, whereas investment has proven to boost it.

We are on the wrong track. Members might wonder why. What I see is that the government has its head stuck in the tar sands and is unable to look beyond a tar sands growth strategy. This is what is going to impede any innovation agenda no matter how strong it is.

Canada has a history of resource dependency which has led to a tendency toward lower rates of productivity and innovation. Canada has done fairly well as a hewer of wood, drawer of water and pumper of oil, but we have paid the price with a less productive economy. This is an economic history that is catching up to Canada.

We have an ageing population. Add to that the growing importance of innovation to participate in a world economy, as well as the ecological cost of a resource-dependent economy, and we find ourselves in a very difficult position when considering the future. It is one that demands vision and bold action, but sadly, the

government's economic strategy thus far has been to get rich off the tar sands.

We still offer subsidies to these companies, making the Canadian dollar a petrocurrency that fluctuates. These fluctuations make long-term value-added investments very difficult. That does not sound like very much of an innovation strategy to me.

We have been told the problem is that Canada's business class was lazy and that reducing the tariffs through free trade would whip them into shape. Free trade, corporate tax cuts and deregulation were supposed to solve our productivity problem, but they have not. What they have done is reinforced our nation's dependence on resource exports. It has hampered the government's ability to facilitate real innovation strategy.

Innovation almost by definition means doing something different. It means experimenting. It means promoting diversification of our economy. A laissez-faire approach will actually do the opposite. Giving tax cuts will increase profits to sectors that are not a part of the cutting edge, but they are actually a part of Canada's resource track.

● (1210)

A real strategy would provide direct support to entrepreneurs in the communities they are a part of. It would nurture them in early experimentation. It would help them network with other sectors and industries to facilitate knowledge exchange. It would give them basic infrastructure, and this does include social infrastructure, such as access to family security and strategies to gain community support for their endeavours.

An innovation strategy for Canada needs to include social infrastructure that will support communities and support hubs of knowledge sharing and innovation. This basic infrastructure must include housing. We are a country in desperate need of a national housing strategy. We are the only G8 country not to have this strategy.

My colleague from Vancouver East has introduced Bill C-304. This would create a national housing strategy for this country, a strategy that would also incorporate the very latest environmental and energy efficiency standards into this framework. We could transform communities across Canada, by providing not just stable and affordable housing, but sustainable and energy efficient housing as well. A stable community, a housed community, a community that has the means to survive: this is a productive community and yet the overwhelming majority of Conservative MPs do not support our housing bill.

Government Orders

While the U.K. is committing to retrofit all homes by 2030 with firm interim targets, our government just announced that it is going to cancel the very successful eco-energy home retrofit program. According to Green Communities Canada, which was actually the first organization to deliver the national home energy efficiency program, this program has stimulated hundreds of millions of dollars in energy savings for Canadians. A program like this generates huge savings. It also creates green jobs and improves our competitiveness, yet the program is being cancelled.

We are fed the line that the answer is to cut taxes, that if we cut taxes, we will instantly become productive and competitive. I recently attended a showing of *Poor No More*, a Canadian documentary. It was shown here on the Hill. It did a great job of dispelling this myth. It took a look at Ireland.

Ireland is often held up as being an example of a country that cut all of its corporate taxes and then succeeded economically, providing a model to follow. However, the example of Ireland is much more complex and nuanced than that. One piece of the puzzle is that Ireland has free post-secondary education. Ireland is committed to educating its citizens, inspiring them and creating a strong competitive and knowledgeable workforce that is the perfect breeding ground for innovation and productivity.

We need to take that kind of bold action in Canada. We need to ensure that every generation of Canadians has access to training and education in order to maximize the nation's productivity and responsiveness to new trends in research. We need to remove barriers to post-secondary education and stop the year-to-year increases in debt that graduates are laden with.

As the NDP critic for first nations, Inuit and Métis affairs focusing on urban aboriginal issues, it is of particular interest to me that aboriginal friendship centres have again been left out of this budget. Friendship centres need increased funding to provide services, to renovate their crumbling buildings and to better their technological capabilities. They are the heart of the urban aboriginal community. We have learned that about half of our first nations people live in urban centres. The friendship centres are vital to Canadian urban centres. They are a hub of activity and culturally appropriate programming and community collaboration. They deserve a fair shake. They are an economically sound investment.

If we invest in social infrastructure and add to that investment in other infrastructures that will specifically support innovation, we can start to piece together an innovation strategy for Canada. Imagine that. It can be done.

We know historically that certain technologies have created waves of innovation and that nations can position themselves strategically within these dynamics to achieve economic performance. In the last century we saw growth position around oil, and automobile and mass production, as well as a move toward an economy based on information and communications technologies.

• (1215)

Last year we found ourselves in a recession. Well, this was an opportunity because typically recessions are periods of change, when new periods of technology break through. This is why the Conservatives' scattershot stimulus spending was so short-sighted.

They have run up a deficit, with nothing to show for it, and they failed to position Canada for the next wave of innovation, and the next wave is very likely to be one based on ecologically friendly technologies, and it needs to be if we are going to avoid catastrophic climate change. This is where Canada should be building new knowledge and expertise and encouraging entrepreneurship.

The NDP has already fostered successful co-operation with our green car industrial strategy. The Conservatives, on the other hand, are pushing against this wave, as we have seen in their attempts to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Leon Benoit): Order, please. The member is out of time. We will go now to questions and comments. The hon. member for Yukon.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy the member mentioned social infrastructure. I chaired a forum during the prorogation on the Arctic and one of the issues raised was the need for more women's shelters and residential substance abuse treatment centres in the north.

The question I want to ask her relates to health care. The member appropriately mentioned that we have a quickly aging population that will put huge strains on our health care system. She also said that this budget and the throne speech should be a vision and bold action. What vision and bold action is there in the throne speech and budget to do with this huge increase in demand on the health care system?

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, where is the bold vision for health care? I do not see one. As the member very rightly points out, we do have an aging population, so there are opportunities to be bold about the future. However, it is not just opportunities. I think it is necessary for us to do that.

I would like to give one example. I have talked a lot with various associations working on Alzheimer's. We do have this aging population. More and more people are being diagnosed with dementia and Alzheimer's. This group has said that if it could get the federal government to take on a leadership role and actually have a strategy about how to deal with dementia and Alzheimer's, then it could save what could be an impending collapse of our health care system trying to deal with this issue.

Let us be bold and visionary and let us plan for the future. Let us have a summit and bring together the great minds on dementia and Alzheimer's to actually plan out what our future will look like. It is not just Alzheimer's and dementia. It is so many other aspects of our health care system that will be pushed to the very brink because of our aging population. This budget certainly does not have a vision for that.

Government Orders

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the member is aware that last year the banks made record profits, in fact \$15.9 billion, and the CEOs of the banks received record salaries and benefits as well. The presidents and CEOs of the RBC and the TD made roughly \$10.4 million. One would think that the Conservatives would be supporting President Barack Obama to overhaul the financial institutions given what we have seen with a world recession over the last year. We have *The Globe and Mail* reporter, Tara Perkins, today reporting that the bankers in Canada are concerned about these international rules that are coming from the G7 and G8. In fact, they have the finance minister of Canada out there acting basically as an unpaid lobbyist for the banking industry in Canada.

As a matter of fact, I have been told that guidelines are being put forward by the G7 and G8 on compensation for bank CEOs and presidents. We have the banks lobbying actively against it and we have the finance minister of Canada looking out for those banks trying to make certain that for whatever the G7 and G8 want to put forward in terms of guidelines that he exempts the Canadian banks. He is supporting this laissez-faire approach to free enterprise, which, by the way, got us into this mess in the first place. It is basically a throwback to the George Bush Republican days in the United States.

Does the member have any comments about why the Conservatives would be actively promoting the interests of the banks at the international level?

• (1220)

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Elmwood—Transcona for his passionate question.

What intrigued me the most was when the member likened the finance minister to an unpaid lobbyist for banks. All I could think about was, what if we had a finance minister or, God forbid, a human resources and skills development minister who was an unpaid lobbyist for people living in poverty, for Canada's most vulnerable citizens.

We do have in the budget an increase to the child tax credit of \$3.23 a week. No one will say no to that, but the way that people are forced to live when they are low income Canadians is shocking. If those ministers could actually see what is going on in the households of Canadians, I am sure they would act. They would need to.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise again in this House to speak out against the implementation of the recent budget and to show how much the Conservatives have once again failed to meet their responsibilities to the Canadian public, and especially how badly they have failed the Quebec nation.

In fact, they had time to listen to the people, because to conceal their incompetence, the Conservatives suspended the work of Parliament. They wanted to silence criticism about the Afghan detainees affair, about the environment and about a number of other important issues, rather than accept the recommendations of the three opposition parties, which, I would note in passing, represent 60% of the members of the House of Commons. What is the result of all that,

of this whole fine farce? A budget that in no way reflects the interests and aspirations of Quebecker.

To ensure that Quebec was respected in this budget, the Bloc Québécois travelled to the four corners of Quebec. My colleagues and I met with numerous organizations, community groups and socio-economic groups, and numerous individuals, throughout the time Parliament was prorogued.

After analyzing those meetings, we sent the Minister of Finance a complete list of recommendations. Because we had done all the work for him, it would have been easy for him to include measures in the budget to meet the needs of the Quebec nation, but once again, that has not been done.

When we go back to our own ridings, people talk to us about the injustices in the budget, and they are shocked at the lack of measures that benefit them. This is particularly true for regions like mine, for the riding of Rimouski—Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, in the Lower St. Lawrence region, because we have to admit, development in regions like mine and others in Quebec, and keeping the land populated, are certainly not priority issues for the Conservative government. That is unfortunate, because those regions are an essential part of our communities.

During my 2008 campaign, I made high-speed Internet access one of my priorities. Today, this issue is still high on my list, because I think it is crucial to the maintenance and development of a region like ours. High-speed Internet access is not only an indispensable means of communication, it is also an essential tool for business management and development.

I will give just one example. I am a dairy farmer. I am lucky because my farm is located not too far from an urban centre and I have had access to high-speed Internet for a long time. Many of my fellow dairy farmers do not have access to it, and to manage their herds—which is essential in the competitive world we now live in—they have to take their farm data to their neighbour's in order to transmit it to a network centre. It is very difficult for these people to be on the cutting edge.

In my region there are also a lot of sugar bushes and maple syrup producers. They need this tool to market their products worldwide. They do not even have high-speed Internet access. This is very regrettable. It is a curb on economic development. Appropriate investment in high-speed Internet would not be an expense, but an investment.

I am talking about high-speed Internet service because insufficient funds were allocated to its expansion in the last budget. Everywhere we went, in all the regions and sometimes even in a few urban centres, this demand for better access to high-speed Internet was constantly being made to us, every day. So this demand should be given priority.

• (1225)

I don't know if the Conservatives are aware of it, but the era of tom-toms and smoke signals as modes of communication is over.

Government Orders

Where I live in the Lower St. Lawrence region, the regional conference of elected officials has headed up and submitted a very complete project to the broadband Canada program, requesting a grant which would enable the great majority of all the people in the Lower St. Lawrence—eight RCMs—to have access to this service. Only \$7 million dollars is needed. I myself have supported this project, and I have called upon the minister responsible for an update on the decision on granting the money for this project. The incredibly long delay is leaving far too many citizens, businesses and communities in distress.

It is not surprising to see the Conservatives acting this way. They seem to delight in announcing their intentions at the very last minute. Such delays are often harmful to the management of organizations and businesses. One need only consider the announcement in the last few hours about the renewal and funding of the CFDCs. One need only consider as well the incredible delay surrounding the semi-announcement of the employment insurance transitional measures. All of these delays are creating uncertainty and distress for those who need this project.

The CFDCs are very important to certain regions in Quebec. These organizations work hard every day in support of their communities, and this delay has been very worrisome to them. Over the last few weeks, we have had the opportunity to question the government about these provisional measures, and as might be expected, the answer came in the last few minutes before the expected deadline. Once again, unfortunately, it was only half an answer. This is very unfortunate for these people who are suffering and need the small amount of support the government provides.

Returning to high-speed Internet, my colleague the hon. member for Sherbrooke asked an excellent question of the government yesterday, when he asked why the decision-making process surrounding the broadband Canada program was so slow. Unfortunately, the answer was not as interesting as the question. However, it enabled us to conclude—even though we already knew—that the regions are not very important to the Conservative government. If things were different, they would not put off the deadlines and would put more effort into these grants.

As the Bloc critic for private woodlots, there is another matter of great concern to me. Owners of private woodlots were also totally ignored in the last budget. Despite the economic situation in which forestry producers find themselves, for the third budget in a row, the Conservative government totally ignored their needs, especially owners of private woodlots, of whom I am one.

The government does not seem to realize that Quebec's private forests are owned by 130,000 people, of whom 35,000 are legally recognized as forestry producers. Even more important, 20,000 of these producers sell lumber, and of them, 3,000 have silvicultural work and the sale of lumber as their main source of income. Nothing was announced to help them, even though what the Bloc Québécois wanted was not very complicated. They could be helped through certain tax arrangements, including a registered silvicultural savings plan, so that they could spread out their income from forestry operations and reinvest it in their woodlots. The 3,000 producers who live off Quebec's private forests have received nothing at all since the start of the forestry crisis. These people have equipment and investments and so we wanted a program for them.

● (1230)

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we had a national dream for a railway that joined the country from coast to coast. In this modern world, the national dream may be Internet and cellphone access for the entire country. That is why the Liberal leader mentioned how essential it was that rural and remote Canada be connected by the Internet. The member eloquently mentioned that. I can imagine the shock that community access sites must have felt when they received letters saying that their funding would be reduced.

Could the member continue on with his theme about the government's vision of electronic infrastructure in this modern world?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I am pleased to see that he agrees with us regarding access to high-speed Internet service across the country.

In this day and age, Internet is a cutting edge way for people to communicate effectively with one another. The Internet also provides highly rural areas like mine the tools to develop and gain access to markets and advanced information. As we know, the Internet is a great source of all the latest information.

It is absolutely deplorable that the Conservative government fails to provide rural communities with enough money to have access to the Internet. It is also deplorable that it has yet to announce initiatives which are anxiously awaited, particularly in areas like mine, including the Conférence générale des éluEs du Bas Saint-Laurent, which involves eight RCMs and would allow almost every citizen and business to connect to high-speed Internet.

● (1235)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as usual, I greatly appreciated the remarks by my colleague from Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques. He is always well prepared and he once again gave an excellent speech.

With Bill C-9, the Conservative government is attacking Canada Post. This bill, if passed, will weaken Canada Post's ability to provide services, particularly in rural areas like his.

First, I would like to know how worried my hon. colleague's constituents are about a possible reduction of Canada Post services.

Ma second question concerns softwood lumber. An additional tax has now been put on softwood lumber products from Quebec. Does the member think that the Bloc Québécois was wrong to support the softwood lumber agreement, in light of the additional taxes which are—

The Deputy Speaker: I must stop the hon. member there to allow enough time for the hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques to respond.

Government Orders

Mr. Claude Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his first question but, unfortunately, I do not think I have enough time to answer the second one.

The hon. member is absolutely right regarding Canada Post. It is very worrisome. In a predominantly rural riding like mine, it has been a constant concern for my constituents ever since I was elected, in 2008. There are 39 municipalities in my riding and each and everyone of them has sent me letters saying that people are very concerned about the Conservative government's desire to introduce bills that may weaken Canada Post.

[*English*]

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity today to join in the debate on Bill C-9, the budget implementation bill. We are in the House of Commons, Commons referring to commoners or ordinary Canadians in today's terms. We are called here to participate, debate and make decisions on behalf of ordinary Canadians.

This budget gives money to the people who have the most money and ordinary Canadians, especially those who have the least, the least amount of money. Remember a budget really is the soul of a government, so what are the priorities for the Conservative government? In my mind this budget makes the wrong choices. The budget chooses to hand out tax breaks to big corporations, but does little to help struggling Canadians make ends meet.

It is obvious who gets the most in the budget. It is the \$6 billion in a corporate tax giveaway that is the highlight of the budget. We cannot afford those the tax cuts. We can not only afford them, it does nothing for our economy but pad the pockets of the big polluting oil companies. The tax cuts create very few jobs. They wind up in the wallets of the corporate executives after they increase their own bonuses. Do these millionaire executives really need a raise, courtesy of the taxpayers of Canada? I do not believe so. Who needs the raise? The 250,000 senior citizens who live in poverty.

A few weeks ago, at a pension forum in my riding of Trinity—Spadina, a woman called Vera told her story, among other seniors who told their stories. Her story stands out most in my mind. She is in her mid-eighties and is very dignified. She used to be the founder of the African Theatre Company of Canada located on Madison Avenue. During the seventies and eighties, she did a lot of good work creating culture and training many actors who are now in Hollywood. She gave up her nursing job in order to do that, but as an artist she does not have much of a pension. Now that she is retired, she finds herself in deep financial trouble.

After the meeting, she pulled me aside and told me that she did not know how she would pay her \$200 hydro bill. A few months ago she could not pay the hydro bill and that was not the first time it had happened. We worked out her income. She gets less than \$16,000 a year, combining her Canada pension plan, which is not much, the old age security and the tiny guaranteed income supplement. How will she pay her hydro bill? She has to make a decision whether to turn off her heat, or stop travelling, or pay the rent, or cut back on her food costs. That is not the way to treat our seniors.

As New Democrats, we have suggested to the Conservatives that instead of the big corporate tax cuts, why not take some of the funds, only \$700 million, and invest them in the guaranteed income

supplement. That would lift every senior in our country out of poverty. That is what we should be doing as Canadians, as participants, as members of Parliament in the House of Commons. That is the kind of decision we should make, but it is not in the budget.

What else can we do with that \$6 billion? We could invest in children who are our future. Let us invest in high quality, affordable child care so parents can go to work knowing full well that their kids will be in good learning and care facilities in a loving environment, in stimulating child care centres. We know the OECD reports that of all the industrialized countries we rank last in our investment for children.

● (1240)

Part of the \$6 billion, a small portion of it in fact starting with only \$25 million, would create universal nutritious food and healthy snacks for our children. Whether they are in schools, community centres, child care centres, they could get a decent meal, a hot lunch perhaps, apples, milk or something nutritious.

Over the last two decades, our children are growing obese and becoming unhealthy. A girl who is 10 or 11 years old is now 11 pounds heavier than 20 years ago. For a boy, it is something like 15 pounds heavier than a few decades ago. What does that say to members of Parliament and government? We are not investing in our kids to ensure they are eating properly and combatting child poverty and child obesity. We could spend part of that \$6 billion on our children.

We could also use part of the \$6 billion to create and build a clean energy future. We could commit to providing dedicated funding for public transit, transferring 1¢ of the existing gas tax to municipalities to fund public transit, invest in transit expansion programs, like the exciting Toronto transit city projects that have six streetcar and LRT lines across the city. However, this budget does not designate funding to public transit.

Toronto taxpayers will have to shoulder the costs of new streetcars and light rails. Riders will continue to face excessive wait times for buses and streetcars and commuters will continue to waste time and energy idling their cars on clogged highways and roads. Transit is a backbone of our urban economies.

The government could have strengthened our economy and created green jobs by funding public transit. Instead it made the wrong choice.

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The budget could also have continued and expanded the very popular eco-energy program so it covered even more buildings, homes, condominiums and even affordable housing. Those residents living in affordable housing need their buildings retrofitted so energy bills, like the ones that Vera has to pay, would not be as high. Right now they are using electric baseboard heat, which is expensive and it is also very energy inefficient.

A part of the \$6 billion could have gone to help struggling students by lowering the tuition for post-secondary education. It could have helped graduate students to do volunteer work overseas, or participate in internship and apprenticeship programs by allowing them to delay their students loans while they were doing meaningful work overseas. Most of those are non-paying jobs or very poorly paid jobs.

We could have used part of the funds to hire more doctors, nurses or even nursing aids so more seniors could stay at home and receive better home care.

Part of the \$6 billion could have paid a bit more in foreign aid. Right now we are only spending .033% of the GDP to foreign aid and that is nowhere near enough.

The budget could have plugged some of the leaks and closed the tax havens, whether it is in the Bahamas or in Belize. That could bring in more revenue for the government and it would provide funding for ordinary Canadians.

That is the kind of budget we should support. Instead the Conservative budget is making the wrong choices. That is why we are not supporting the bill.

●(1245)

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the member for Trinity—Spadina.

The member talked about specific things, for example, affordable child care, public transit, affordable housing and student financial support. I agree with her. However, I am not going to stand up and criticize the Conservative government. It has an agenda. That is what it does.

I want to ask this hon. member a very simple question. If, indeed, she believes in this stuff, then why did the NDP betray Canadians in 2005 when there was a deal for child care?

We had the program and the provinces signed on. There was money for public transit and the provinces signed on. There was money for affordable housing, \$1.3 billion. There was money for students.

Today, if these groups do not have money, the NDP members should be ashamed of themselves because they betrayed Canadians. They were in cahoots with the new government and good for them, but I do not blame the government for what it is doing. It told us what it would do. The NDP just simply agreed.

If the member does not like these cuts, it is her party's doing. How is she going to answer to the voters who support her?

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, let us look at March 2010.

On March 10, 30 members of Parliament from the Liberal Party chose to walk out and not participate. As a result, this budget passed.

Recently, the Liberal leader said that he, too, supports stopping the corporate tax cuts. We welcome him to that club. The New Democrats have been saying that for a quite a long time. We welcome the Liberals who believe in what we have been proposing.

However, if that is the case, then will the Liberals not stand up within the next few days? The budget implementation bill is coming up for a vote. All MPs should show up in their seats, and stand up and vote with their conscience.

Instead, what we are going to see, just like on March 10 of this year, is that the Liberal Party of Canada is going to absent itself, even though it has said this budget makes the wrong choice, there are missed opportunities, and it does not believe in it. However, the Liberals are going to let this budget pass one more time, just like the last budget, just like the last bill.

I really lament this kind of behaviour.

●(1250)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Trinity—Spadina is one of the foremost advocates for equality in this House of Commons.

She knows, she is well aware, that what we have seen, dramatically, under the former Liberal government and the current Conservative government, is a push back on the kind of equality that Canadians want to see.

Income inequality in Canada is now at the same level, shamelessly, shockingly, as it was in the 1920s. Prior to the CCF and the NDP coming into being, pushing the big business parties, the Conservatives and the Liberals, into some measure of equality, we have now seen the Conservatives and the Liberals push back and push the middle class and poor Canadians to the point where there is more inequality than there has been in any other time since the 1920s. They have basically pushed us back a century.

I wanted to ask the member, since she represents Toronto and since the only part of the country where Liberals still get elected is really the city of Toronto, how people in Toronto, her constituents, react to the fact that the Liberals are once again propping up this tired old right-wing agenda, this time being brought from the Conservative Party rather than the Liberal Party?

How do her constituents react to this sellout and repudiation of basic Canadian values?

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Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, Toronto has a large number of new immigrants, for example. This budget is really missing the mark. New immigrants are not seeing any more funding in this budget. Family reunification still takes a huge amount of time. It takes 3, 5, 8, even 10 years to sponsor a parent from overseas. New immigrants are having a hard time finding a job that they trained for, and as a result there is a higher percentage living in poverty. We see that very much in Toronto. It is unfortunate that this budget does nothing for immigrants.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to address this budget implementation bill. All Bloc Québécois members were opposed to the budget because they think it is a bad budget, particularly for Quebec.

The Conservative government had an opportunity to send a true message of support to Quebec, which is experiencing serious problems related to the last financial crisis, which is not over yet. That crisis began long before the financial crisis that has affected the other provinces. The decline of the forestry industry over the past number of years was the prelude to this crisis. Once again, the Conservative government did not include anything in its budget to correct this most unfortunate situation for Quebec.

In that budget, on the same page, the government agreed to give in excess of \$10 billion to the automotive sector, which is primarily located in Ontario, while allocating a measly \$170 million for the forestry industry in all of Canada.

It is completely bizarre and it is a slap in the face to Quebec. For that reason alone, it is absolutely inconceivable that Bloc Québécois members could come out in support of this bill. We had proposed several very specific and very concrete measures to eliminate the deficit and the debt in the long term.

This budget implementation bill confirms the desire of the Conservative government to protect rich taxpayers at all costs. One thing we had proposed was to impose a surtax on people earning over \$150,000 and another on people earning over \$250,000, but we found nothing like that in the budget, even though that could have brought in nearly \$4 billion a year for the government's coffers. The government has ignored those proposals, and, once again, has chosen instead to put all the problems on the shoulders of the middle class. As well, the banks and big corporations are still not being asked to pay their fair share in this budget.

This morning, I was reading in *La Presse* that the Minister of Finance in the Conservative government is even rejecting proposals made by other members of the G8 and the G20 to tax the profits of the big banks, which are in large part responsible for the financial crisis we have gone through and the effects of which we are still feeling. By refusing to make the ones that are responsible pay, we are automatically making the middle class and working people pay for the consequences of the mistakes they have already had to endure.

The measures set out in this bill clearly illustrate that desire, since corporations are not being asked to pay their fair share in order to increase government revenue. The Bloc Québécois submitted precise recommendations to the government and suggested options worth considering. The finance critic held consultations all over Quebec,

with the entire population, in order to propose concrete measures, but the Conservative government did not accept them.

• (1255)

Once again, it has opted to protect the wealthiest, the banks and corporations, at the expense of working people and the middle class.

Tax loopholes are another major point. The government is engaging in double talk. On the one hand, we hear the Minister of Finance, or other ministers, saying that they make no sense. The Minister of National Revenue said that, for one. He said he wanted to tackle tax havens, but essentially, with the bill we have before us, he is opening loopholes in the Income Tax Act to allow corporations that are not registered in Canada to avoid paying their fair share of taxes.

There are a lot of examples like that one, where the Conservative government is engaging in double talk. It says it is acting in good faith, it says it wants to face the facts and try to get back all the taxes that should be paid in Canada, and yet on the other hand, it is putting in place measures that preserve the loopholes. We are hearing considerable discontent among the public on this issue. People are disillusioned. We know what is going on in the government of Quebec. It has been hit with a major credibility crisis.

At the same time, I think this affects the federal political class as well because the general public realizes that when the government tables a budget like this, it is not ordinary people who benefit. The public knows that, once again, the government did not take into account the people who pay their taxes every day. It simply carried on with measures to protect the rich. It protects people who are powerful and busy making their money grow. The public is fed up with hearing this and seeing these kinds of things perpetuated year after year. It still continues today.

We could point as well to the Telecommunications Act, which was amended to allow foreign companies, the owners or operators of certain transmission facilities, to function as telecommunications companies in Canada. This does not help our companies. They talk about helping companies. We are against the government doing too much for companies, but when they adopt measures like these to help foreign companies, it is doubly nonsensical. Once again, there is a double meaning. They say they want to help both companies and consumers. However, the companies already established in Quebec and Canada will have to pay for decisions like this.

We also saw in this budget and in Bill C-9, ensuring the implementation of the budget, that the government will not even shrink from looting the employment insurance fund. A kind of independent fund was created two years ago. I say a kind of fund advisedly because many people criticized it and said it was not large enough. At least the government made a start on an independent employment insurance fund. Now it will fall back to zero. All the fine principles used to justify its creation have been jettisoned and the government will not shrink now from pillaging it. It will fall back to zero and be replaced with an employment insurance operating account, which will start from zero.

When this fund was established two years ago, both businesses and big banks said it was a good idea to create a fund like this. However, it should have \$15 billion in it instead of the \$2 billion the government injected. Now the government is even coming to get these \$2 billion. That money was there as insurance, in case of difficult years for employment. Now all is lost. The Conservative government and its Liberal predecessor pillaged a total of \$57 billion from the employment insurance fund—money that belongs to employers and employees.

• (1300)

It is totally absurd. I have mentioned only a few examples which make it absolutely impossible and unacceptable for the Bloc Québécois to vote in favour of this bill.

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member's speech on a very technical area.

Just a few minutes ago, I got a question from a constituent, and I would like the member to give his view on it. The constituent said he is sick and tired of what he called the big cable and big telecom twins. He said it is time we had some real competition “up here” and opened up copper and fibre. He would appreciate it if I could support legislation that finally gets them some customer competition, and that means everyone getting access to copper and fibre and getting rid of the evil twins.

I am wondering if the member has suggestions on opening up competition, having better competition and therefore consumer rates in these areas.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Madam Speaker, I could answer the member's question by referring to the whole issue of the initiative launched by the government in last year's budget introducing a program to extend high-speed Internet access to many remote areas of Quebec and Canada. This year, the Conservative government missed a great opportunity.

From what we have gathered so far from the answers we have been given, there was a demand totalling almost \$1 billion, or \$900 million, but only \$75 million or \$80 million a year was provided in the budget. This would have been a great opportunity to move these areas forward, help them and promote their economic and cultural development. Funding should have been provided to meet the demand. This way, everyone in Canada and Quebec could have been connected and could have developed very equitably. But once again, we can see that \$10 billion was invested predominantly in Ontario regions for the automotive industry only, while all that was required to meet the needs across Canada and Quebec might have been \$1 billion. That was not done, and that too is unacceptable.

• (1305)

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a question about the budget and this government's agenda.

Does it concern him that this budget actually gives precedence to profitable Canadian industries like the oil industry or the banking industry, instead of giving precedence to the people, those Canadians

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who have suffered because of the recession job losses in other sectors, such as the forestry and manufacturing industries? The fact is that there is not really anything in this budget to help these Canadians in terms of all they need at this time.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Madam Speaker, yes, absolutely. I understand my NDP colleague's question. In fact, this reminds me of the proposals the Bloc Québécois made to the Conservative government before it tabled the budget. We told the government that it was important to include measures for people who have just gone through this crisis, for communities and for businesses. We said it was important to support them. However, the Conservative government, ever ideology-oriented, continued focusing its efforts and assistance on the banking sector and the oil industry, which is one of the biggest polluters. It is completely ignoring people who have lost their jobs, who are having difficulty just getting by, and who are going through serious hard times.

As we know, in all single-industry environments, especially in the forestry industry, people are having a very hard time. Proposals have been made, such as eliminating the two-week waiting period for EI benefits. That would have helped. Everyone we meet tells us that when two people in the same family lose their jobs, the worst part is that there are no measures to help them during the first two weeks of unemployment. This is completely unacceptable and the Conservative government should have introduced such a measure.

[*English*]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, the title says it all: Bill C-9, jobs and economic growth act. On the face of it, this critical bill ignores an important federal mandate, the legislative and constitutional duty to protect the environment. Part 20 represents a clear abrogation of federal duty. It appears to contradict the government's stated mantra of the need to balance the economy with the environment.

In the 2010 budget, the government declares Canada to be a clean energy superpower. Then in its budget implementation act, the environment component is completely exorcized in both the name and the measures.

The Prime Minister promotes seeking for Canada to be a clean energy superpower. His government committed in the fall, 2008, throne speech to support technologies that will not emit greenhouse gases. His government also committed to a 90% national target for non-emitting electricity sources. How is the government going to do this? It is going to do this by deep-sixing renewable power and giving further subsidies to the dirtiest source of power, coal.

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While Canadians thought the 2009 federal budget set a new high-water mark for perverse economic policies, this year exceeds that backward slide. The government is leaving our country mired in 19th century fossil fuel economy. The Harper government's failures can be found not just in the specifics but in the very principles that guide its regulatory and fiscal policies. The Harper government is holding fast to its long-held and—

● (1310)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I would just ask the hon. member to remember not to mention the name of a sitting member.

Ms. Linda Duncan: I am sorry, Madam Speaker.

This government, led by Prime Minister Harper—

An hon. member: No. Prime Minister.

Ms. Linda Duncan: No, I can't say that? I am very sorry. I was not aware I could not say his name. That is fine. I will not mention his name again.

The current government is holding fast to its long-held and false assumptions that protecting the environment always comes with a significant impact on the economy. If this trade-off ever existed, it has long been replaced, at least in informed circles, by the need to move into the new economy.

The International Energy Agency weighed in this week by saying that Canada's record to date in addressing greenhouse gases suggests meeting even the meagre targets committed by Canada at Copenhagen “will present policymakers across the country with an immense test. It remains unclear how national targets are to be co-ordinated, divided and enforced among the provinces and territories.”

The IEA recommended that Canada produce a more coordinated national energy efficiency policy. Counted among many others who have recommended federal action on national energy efficiency are the former Conservative trade minister and chair of the Energy Policy Institute of Canada, David Emerson, and the right-of-centre Alberta-based Canada West Foundation.

Yet, what the government delivers in this budget is cuts to the very programs that were enabling more efficient energy use, including the highly popular eco-energy home retrofit program.

While the current government argues that it is in sync with the United States, nothing could be further from the truth. The United States government is proceeding with bills and expenditures focused on U.S. energy security and sustainability, encompassing actions on climate and energy efficiency and investments in renewables. The U.S. clearly gets it. When will the current government get on board?

However, I wish to focus particularly on part 20 of this bill. There is clear intent in this part to erase environmental considerations from all federal stimulus spending and to emasculate the remainder of federal reviews. The proposed legal reforms directly contradict the legal mandate of the environment minister.

The Department of the Environment grants the minister his powers, duties and responsibilities. And contrary to the minister's assertions that his responsibility is to balance economy and

environment, nowhere in that act, which mandates his power, is there any mention of that need to balance.

The intent of part 20 directly contradicts one of the minister's duties; that is, to require the assessment of any new federal projects. The minister's duty to assess impacts was first abrogated in last year's budget when the Navigable Waters Protection Act was eviscerated.

If Bill C-9 is passed, the majority of federally funded projects will be exempted.

First, part 20 of the bill exempts a large swath of federally funded projects from a key regulatory trigger: federal financing. This is done despite the fact the majority of projects merely undergo an initial screening.

Second, the government is responding to recent court rulings confirming federal responsibilities to assess project impacts, by simply empowering the minister to narrow the scope of any assessment.

The most obvious question is: Why are these significant amendments to the federal law included in a budget implementation bill?

The legally required review of the federal law, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, is slated to come before the parliamentary committee within weeks. Unlike the process for this bill, reviews before the parliamentary committee allow detailed consideration and hearing from all the affected stakeholders.

Is this simply another example of the failed promises on transparency and participation in governance?

Next, is this emasculation of federal impact assessment simply being done to save money. And if so, is it money for the government or for industrial proponents?

Where is the evidence of this alleged unnecessary duplication and overlap? The government has yet to table a single example.

The key to considering the appropriateness of this reform is the recognition of federal jurisdiction. The Supreme Court of Canada has, in a series of decisions, clearly upheld federal jurisdiction and responsibility for the environment, including environmental impact assessment.

One of the most frequently cited Supreme Court cases is the decision on *Friends of the Oldman River Society vs Canada*.

As the court held:

Local projects will generally fall within the provincial responsibility...federal participation will be required if...the project impinges on an area of federal jurisdiction.

The federal law specifies three triggers for federal assessment. One of those is federal finance. The second is any areas of federal responsibility. Both are eviscerated by this bill.

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Is the rationale to ensure more coordinated federal and provincial cooperation in environmental assessment? This was recognized and responded to years back. Measures taken included the harmonization accord; federal-provincial bilateral agreements; coordination in the field; and joint panels. By these provisions, the government has slung an axe to its duties where only a scalpel slice may have been necessary.

• (1315)

Of equal concern is the decision to grant the Minister of the Environment the complete discretion to decide to narrow the scope of any federal assessment. Again, the sense is that this change was simply to limit future judicial scrutiny of the government's decisions.

Separate and apart from that concern is the potential for conflict of interest. Surely the decision on the scope or extent of a federal assessment should be removed from any potential political considerations. For example, any assessment of a pipeline or export power line that the government has endorsed surely should not be made based on the decision of a minister who may well have endorsed those projects. Again, that is the case of the Mackenzie pipeline.

Contrary to what the minister has suggested, the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, in his 2009 audit, did not in fact recommend that this role be assigned to the minister. The commissioner merely recommended that the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency propose options to the minister, and the agency in reply said that it looked forward to putting forward options to the parliamentary committee in the very hearings that will commence in a few weeks.

A bigger question is whether this law change represents an underhanded attempt at a constitutional amendment. This is a long-standing request by the Alberta government and perhaps other governments to get the federal government out of the environment business on their turf. This is certainly the case on fisheries, a unilateral area of federal jurisdiction. What of the duty to assess impacts to first nation peoples, their lands and waters? What of the federal power over transboundary impacts? Are these, too, being ceded to the provinces? Is this a case of illegal sub-delegation?

In considering this bill, members must consider the duties under federal law to regulate, manage, prevent or mitigate environmental impacts. The very purpose of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act is to implement the government's duty under the precautionary principle to identify and prevent unnecessary environmental impacts. Where the effort is not made to assess these potential impacts, how can the government credibly claim to be exercising those powers effectively?

Finally, to the matter of the transfer of environmental impact assessment duties to the National Energy Board and the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission. Indeed, this is already allowed under law. What is of grave concern is the broad brush policy decision to completely transfer the environmental assessment function for the majority of these reviews to these agencies out of the very agency set up at arm's length to review environmental impacts.

Contrary to what the minister has asserted, impacted communities and families have not been satisfied with the way those agencies

have delivered environmental reviews. A non-government report on the New Brunswick facility did not give it the glowing review the minister professes. In the case of the National Energy Board review of the first export power line out of Alberta, dissatisfaction in the assessment of impacts resulted in court action. Central to the case was the failed consideration of impacts on farmers by the Energy Board.

In summary, I am absolutely opposed to the passage of Bill C-9, particularly part 20.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the detail on the environment and understand the member's expertise in that area. I would like to ask her two questions relating to that area.

First, the Conservatives have sort of made a laughing stock of themselves in the other place by putting forward a motion related to freedom of speech when they do not even allow their own members the freedom of speech. However, in relation to that, can she comment on the freedom not allowed to scientists on the environment or environmental officials, which was quite an issue recently?

Second, in my area in the north, climate change is causing change faster than anywhere else in the world so we need adaptation. The government, in this budget and the projections, is allowing all the adaptation programs to expire with no sense of hope of reinstating them. I wonder if she could comment on that.

• (1320)

Ms. Linda Duncan: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Yukon for his ongoing support for environmental measures in the House.

With regard to the silencing of scientists, I share the member's concern but I share it in a much broader avenue. We have heard a lot about the concern, for example, that government employed scientists have not had the freedom to share the results that they may have in their own research, or issues of concern that they have raised that should be brought to the attention of the government.

My sense of the concern is even much broader. We have an entire agency, with appropriately skilled people who will conduct the independent review or at least oversee the review by proponents of projects, being completely removed. We can guess that the appropriate officials are probably not vested in the other two agencies that will conduct those reviews.

We need to start looking even deeper into the problems with science. Not only are the scientists not allowed to speak but now they will not be allowed to do the work as well.

On the important matter that he raised about the cutting of funds to adaptation, I share his concern, but I am more deeply concerned that the adaptation costs will escalate due to the fact that the government insists on not taking action and not setting those binding targets.

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It should not cost taxpayers the money to respond to climate change. If we simply impose those legally binding targets and reductions on the major emitters, they will incur those costs rather than taxpayers, and then we can put our money toward helping the lesser developed countries that are bearing the brunt of the impact of our industry.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague, with whom I sit on the environment committee, if she has heard the fantastic news that Canada's greenhouse gas emissions, for the first time in a number of years, have actually been decreased to the tune of 2.1%.

That report was file today. It is good news for Canadians. It is clearly a signal that the government understands, after a previous Liberal government failed and signed on to these glorified numbers, much like what we saw in Bill C-311, which passed yesterday. The Liberals did not do anything about it, other than attempt to ruin Canada's economy and, in particular, Alberta's economy.

I wonder if the member can stand in her place and actually congratulate the government for getting greenhouse gas emissions down with all the investments that we put into the budgets previous to budget 2010, which her party voted against.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Madam Speaker, I would have thought the member would have liked to have expressed similar concern to the fact that our committee is not proceeding with the CEAA review, rather than it being done through a budget with little discussion.

It is good news if the greenhouse gas emissions have been reduced by 2.1%, but I find that rather pathetic, given the fact that they have gone up 35%. I do not know if that is 2.1% of intensity or if it is absolute. What was it?

The thing that I found most noteworthy was that yesterday in the House the parliamentary secretary informed the House that it was no doubt due to the fact that we are reducing coal-fired power. I would like the member to be aware, as he is from the same province as I am, that as we sit here, coal-fired power is expanding in Alberta and various companies are asking to ratchet back their requirements to reduce the greenhouse gases. I do not see the jolly forecast that the member sees.

[Translation]

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Madam Speaker, I was not expecting it to be my turn to take the floor, but I am happy to speak to Bill C-9. This is not a very attractive bill because it relates to implementation of the budget, a budget which the Bloc Québécois finds very disappointing.

While I find this bill to be disappointing, I would like to say that the hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona has indeed given a very good statement on part 20. That was the subject I wanted to address today, but I will not do so since she has handled it very well.

All the same, I shall speak on the environment, because I find that this budget implementation is truly contemptuous, particularly of the forestry sector. In Canada and Quebec, the forest is truly a key component in the reduction of greenhouse gases. The members opposite say that greenhouse gas emissions have been reduced. It is bizarre for the Conservatives to say this, given that they won the third fossil award in Bonn last week. They won this award because

greenhouse gases in Canada have risen 3% over 1990 levels. I do not see how they can claim to be happy with an alleged reduction.

All that was only an aside, and I shall continue now to speak of the lumber industry. Many people speak of this industry as if it simply involved paper mills and mills that cut softwood into two by fours, but it is much more than that.

There is one thing I want to say. The money that should have been invested in the forestry sector would have been used for much more than just cutting down trees and shipping them to the United States. It would have been used to develop engineered wood, something that is now being done, in fact.

Engineered wood is bonded with glue and assembled to make immense spans or big fire-resistant pieces. It is interesting to note that one sawmill employee creates five jobs. One mill employee who cuts two by fours or two by sixes creates five jobs in the lumber industry. It is my impression that the members opposite think that only wood cutting is involved, but it is far more than just that. We have to invest in the forest. Proper forest management is important. This is called stewardship. It means increasing the potential of our forests by managing them so that trees grow larger, there are more of them, and they are in better condition.

It is important to invest in private forests and not just in public forests. It was the government's responsibility to do so, but it did not. In addition to better quality lumber, more forests are created and greenhouse gases are reduced. It is self-evident.

The more trees we have and the bigger they are, the more greenhouse gases are reduced in the atmosphere. That goes without saying. It is also essential to increase incomes in the regions in the short and long run. Our forests are managed very well and are of major importance.

So what do we find in the budget in this regard? Nothing. There is nothing about the management of private forests and the forests that are the future of our regions. There is absolutely nothing about this in the budget. It is not just the future of our remote regions that is at stake but of our less distant regions as well. As I mentioned, a job in a sawmill creates five others in related factories.

The budget dwells on the automobile sector, as if we were going to live or die by it alone. We are going to die with our trees, and they are what is important. If we take that approach, it is possible that one day we could be autonomous in our construction industry and in our biomass from one end of the country to the other.

● (1325)

That is vital. They always take the short-term view, and that shows real contempt.

They treated the automobile industry like a god of some kind and gave it 57 times as much as the forest industry. For every employee who works in a sawmill, five others work in related plants or have a job maintaining our forests.

Trees grow. They are like money in the bank that earns interest. They are something we can give future generations. Unfortunately, we have a government that looks at the future in the rear-view mirror and sets nothing aside for our children.

We will all pay for the numerous tax breaks the government is giving the oil companies. They cost money and are a way of taxing people. These tax breaks amount to \$2.7 billion, and every province and city will have to pay its share.

If green industries had been given the billions of dollars in tax breaks handed out to the oil companies, jobs could have been created. Instead of giving this money exclusively to shareholders, we could have created jobs in healthy work environments, for the future of our country and the future of our young people. The government thinks that oil companies are the future because there will be a shortage of oil. But there is enough in Alberta for a very long time.

There is no overarching vision of our strengths and no strategy for helping the younger generation. Creating green energy means creating an economy that could be exported and could replace fossil fuels. Unfortunately, that is not what they did. They always favour fossil fuels.

The budget increases funding for nuclear energy. Some governments think that nuclear energy is clean, but that is a farce. We have not even found places yet to store the waste. So long as these places have not been found, nuclear energy will remain dirty. In addition, it produces plutonium.

Recently, an agency of the Canadian government produced a report stating that the CANDU reactor might overheat and explode. This is a real sword of Damocles hanging over our heads, but we still keep promoting the reactor, because we know we will make a profit from it. They tried to build a reactor in Ontario. At the end of the day, a kilowatt hour generated by nuclear energy was so expensive that they abandoned the plan. Nuclear energy is starting to be compared to green energy. We are realizing that green energy creates a lot more jobs and is much safer. A windmill will never explode, and the same is true for solar and hydraulic energy.

● (1330)

Getting electricity from deep geothermal energy is also something that will not explode and that will last for years. We might say forever. So why not invest in green energy instead of investing in polluting energy? I know there is a very strong lobby. Nuclear energy has a huge organization lobbying the Canadian government.

We know that our government is very sensitive to lobbying. In fact, that is why there was not much money for forestry. The steel lobby is very strong, as is the cement lobby. So they want to keep wood for small houses only and build them out of two by fours, when we know that engineered lumber could be used to build rooms much bigger than here. So the environment and climate change have been completely ignored in the budget.

Government Orders

We could have changed tack and said now is the time to put money into the green economy. They did not do it and I am very disappointed. The Bloc considers this to be a major reason not to vote for the budget or for this Bill C-9, precisely because it is not looking to our children's future. In this kind of bill we are looking to the past.

● (1335)

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I enjoyed listening to the member. I have two questions for him.

First, does the member think the budget provides any uncertainty, as opposed to certainty, for people? While he is thinking of that, I will give two examples, the food mail program and aboriginal post-secondary education.

The government announced it would make changes, but it has not said what they would be. It will be at some time in the future. If the food people get in jeopardy, I think they would be pretty worried and would want to know what the changes are.

Second, the member talked about the environment and the cancellation of a number of environment programs, like the eco-energy program, the adaptation programs for climate change and the Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmospheric Sciences, where many major scientists are involved in climate change and temperature studies, on droughts, on environment sciences, et cetera and keeping data on that, which is irreplaceable.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his two questions.

I do think the government is currently engaging in a diversion. First, it mentioned a certain number for education. We did not pay too much attention to it because that is under the exclusive jurisdiction of Quebec, of our province and eventually our country.

However, if we look at the environment and the way the bill has been worded, in Part 20, the decision will now come from the minister. What does that mean? If we look at it, the minister will always be deciding everything. It will no longer be groups saying it needs to be done. It will no longer be Parliament, but the minister.

That means that the minister can very well follow the policy issued by cabinets: to promote the development of the oil sands to the exclusion of other things. Whenever an environmental impact study might block a project, it will not be taken into account. We saw the situation two weeks ago with the big Keystone pipeline. Now, we have a Baker train going by. Will an environmental impact study be done? We think not, because that might block the development.

So I agree entirely with my colleague when he says that a lot of things are being concealed. They chose their words carefully to make people happy. People are going to think this is wonderful, but in reality it is so the government will be able to decide as it likes.

Government Orders

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Madam Speaker, earlier, the hon. member wanted to talk about the environment, but since the member from Alberta had already done so, he chose to deal with another issue. A question had been asked by a government member. We were discussing the Conservatives' record and the announcement made yesterday. The member for Wetaskiwin had put the question. He said that greenhouse gases had been reduced and that we did not recognize that.

Perhaps the Bloc member could tell me something. If there has been a greenhouse gas reduction, is it not once again because since 2006, when the Conservatives took office, the mills in Miramichi, Bathurst, Dalhousie and New Richmond have all shut down? Paper mills across the country have closed. All sorts of plants and mills have stopped operating. Perhaps the Conservatives registered the greenhouse gas emissions that came out of these chimneys.

Greenhouse gases may have been reduced, but the Conservatives cannot claim that economic development is responsible for a less polluted environment. It is because plants have shut down. We do not expect the government to protect the environment through regulations.

Does the member agree that this is a more accurate picture of the environmental situation in Canada?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Brome—Missisquoi has about one minute to respond.

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Madam Speaker, I fully agree with the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

Of course, the Conservatives will say that it is thanks to them, but what did they do to achieve that result? Nothing, zero, *niet*. Therefore, they should not take credit and pat themselves on the back. The economy has weakened. As the hon. member pointed out, mills were closed, including some that produced electricity from coal. My colleague is right: in Bonn, last week, Canada received a third fossil award because greenhouse gases have increased in Canada. This was demonstrated by international groups. There has been no reduction in greenhouse gas emissions compared to 1990 but, rather, a 3% increase.

• (1340)

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to Bill C-9, the budget implementation bill. The NDP is opposed to this bill for a number of reasons. My colleagues have addressed a number of topics, but since I am the employment insurance critic, I will focus on that part. For the record, that is not the only thing I am opposed to in Bill C-9. I could go on about many other points.

Bill C-9 includes certain amendments to legislation. The Canada Employment Insurance Commission is continued. It consists of four commissioners. A new employment insurance operating account has been created in the accounts of Canada. This new account was created because the old account in the consolidated revenue fund has been closed.

The Conservatives boast about creating a new employment insurance operating account that will open with \$2 billion. They also boast about not being like the Liberals and not dipping into the employment insurance fund.

This is 2010 and the Conservatives have been in power since 2006. Between 2006 and 2010, who are the mysterious people who stole from the EI fund? It had to be someone. Who stole from the fund between 2006 and 2010? We cannot blame the Liberals for everything. Not everything is their doing. They stole from the EI fund between 1993 and 2006. It cannot be denied; it has been said often enough.

Ironically, during a question period, the Minister of Finance said:

Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, the plain fact is that the previous Liberal government, in the middle of the 1990s, siphoned off the \$58 billion to \$60 billion from the EI fund and put it into the consolidated revenue fund. People do not have to take my word for it. Read what professors—

I remember the words he used, but they were changed in Hansard. He said the Liberals stole between \$58 billion and \$60 billion. "To steal" and "to siphon off" mean the same thing.

Normally when a thief is caught, he has to return the stolen money to its rightful owner. There is more than \$57 billion in surplus in the EI fund. I did not make this up. The Minister of Finance said so in the House of Commons on March 29 .

The blues show that that same day, the Prime Minister rose and acknowledged that the Liberals had stolen money from the EI fund. If money is stolen and then recovered, it must be returned to the people it was stolen from. Who are those people? They are the same people to whom the government is bragging about cutting taxes to major corporations. The government is cutting taxes for the corporations and at the same time wants to increase EI premiums by 15¢ per \$100 of insurable earnings. So it is a tax for workers. But they claim to want to lower taxes.

The government does not believe in taxing people, and the previous government pillaged the employment insurance fund. The Conservatives continued this from 2006 to 2010. Now, with a bill, they are legitimizing this pillaging and are wiping out the government's debt, the surplus belonging to the workers. Now, workers will pay an additional \$223 per year for employment insurance contributions and employers will pay an additional \$312.

• (1345)

The government lowered taxes for workers by \$100 and patted itself on the back, but it will tax them \$212. That is what the government did. It is a tax on workers because workers and employers already paid into the employment insurance fund. They already put money into the employment insurance fund.

The member for Acadie—Bathurst is not the only one saying it. In the question I asked, and I think it is worth repeating, I mentioned that the Canadian Federation of Independent Business recently conducted a survey that showed that 82% of Canadian business owners wanted to see the federal government freeze future increases to EI premiums until the \$57 billion surplus has been fully paid back.

Government Orders

Workers are not the only ones saying that they want the money that was taken from them. Business owners are saying it too: 82% of business owners say that they want the money that was taken from them. They are not asking for a cheque for \$57 billion. What they want is for their premiums not to increase. They are saying that if the government needs money, it should use some of the \$57 billion that it took from them. The government borrowed that money. If it did not steal it, then it should return it to them. If the government stole the money, then we should call the RCMP to come pick up the ministers. That is what we should do.

There are only two things that can be done. On March 29 or 30, the government acknowledged that funds were stolen. But what happened between 2006 and 2010? This same government stole money from the employment insurance fund, too. They want to use Bill C-9 to legalize this theft. But I cannot vote for a bill that would legalize such theft, the biggest theft in Canadian history.

The sponsorship issues in the past were nothing compared to the scandal perpetrated on the backs of this country's workers. It is unparalleled. This is the biggest national scandal ever: taking employment insurance premiums from workers' pay, putting it towards the budget and paying down the debt with this money. The minister acknowledged that funds were stolen but he does not want to turn around and pay back the workers and entrepreneurs. I remind the members that 82% of independent entrepreneurs tell us that they want their money back. That is what has happened.

In addition, there have been changes to employment insurance in this budget. It is all very well for them to pat themselves on the back for new bills as though they can fix everything. I will support the government bill for our people in National Defence. However, there are bigger problems. How many people in this country have cancer, heart problems, and how many need employment insurance benefits for a year but are not entitled even though they paid into them? They are only entitled to 15 weeks. Something could have been done to help workers. Something could have been put in the next budget.

There are other areas where something could be done for the workers, such as lowering the EI eligibility criteria to 350 or 360 hours rather than maintaining the current requirement of 455, 700 or 900 hours. This would help people who are not eligible for employment insurance during an economic crisis. We must not give money only to major corporations through tax cuts. We cut taxes for big business and we put workers on social assistance. Instead, we should be providing assistance to the people who helped make these corporations profitable. These companies have turned a profit a number of times. There are corporate presidents who pay themselves salaries of millions of dollars, not just hundreds of thousands, every year.

The government has turned around, taken pity on big business and given them tax breaks. It is doing the same for banks. The government says that big business and the banks need tax breaks. However, workers who lose their jobs and go on employment insurance are accused of abusing the system. They do not want workers to abuse the system. How many times has the government said in this House that if the number of hours to qualify for benefits is changed to 350, people would work only 10 weeks and receive employment insurance the rest of the time?

● (1350)

I find that shameful. It is an insult to workers. For example, France pays workers 75% of their income when they apply for employment insurance. If asked the question, France would reply that it respects its workers.

[English]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member waxed eloquently on EI. He covered that topic very well. He is an expert in that area and I appreciate that.

However, I want to ask a question on a topic in another area. I know he is well versed in all areas, being the whip for his party. My question is in regard to the government's suggestion of reducing the number of people on boards to save money.

Many people have brought forward the fact that it is not going to save much money because most of those are vacant positions and it is only about 18 part-time people, so that is a red herring.

When we eliminate people from boards, usually they represent someone like the unemployed, or the province of New Brunswick, the federal government or NGOs. If we are eliminating positions, who is going to eliminate them?

Does the member have any concerns on this particular part of the budget implementation bill about eliminating positions on boards and if it will really make a difference?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Madam Speaker, if we eliminate the people who represent the people, there is a problem. I do not think we have ever heard any workers in our country who said that boards are too big. I have heard workers say that there are \$57 billion that belongs to them. If they cannot be represented, it encourages the government to hide what it is doing instead.

I think this is wrong. The labour movement and employers should be able to have a say because they are the payers. The government does not pay 1¢ to employment insurance. All the money comes from employees and employers. They should have a say about who will be on boards to represent people across the country.

It takes longer to travel from Newfoundland to Vancouver than from Montreal to Paris. Just imagine that. It is a big thing to go to France, but that is how big our country is.

I think we have to have a fair representation across the country and it is wrong to eliminate people and put them out of work the way the government is doing, but we understand that.

The Conservative government is a government that is not very transparent. We have seen that in the last couple of weeks. It wants to be transparent by eliminating people as representatives of the people.

Points of Order

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Madam Speaker, I listened to my colleague from the NDP, who said that, sadly, the Conservative government had ignored the unemployed in its budget and had once again failed to improve the employment insurance system.

I would like to hear him on the misappropriation of \$57 billion initiated by the previous Liberal government and continued by this Conservative government at the expense of the unemployed and businesses.

I find it appalling. They do not even have the decency now to give the money back to the people who have worked. Not even a portion of the money is given back to these people at a time when they need help. They are facing financial difficulties, and workers are losing their jobs left and right. Now is the time to give back the \$57 billion, but the money has been squandered.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Madam Speaker, I do not know if my Bloc Québécois colleague heard me, but I spoke about that. I can speak about it again. It gives me the opportunity to say that the problem exists everywhere, not just in the Maritimes and the Atlantic provinces, as they would have us believe.

I did a national tour myself. I went all over the country, to every province. I went to Timmins, to Sudbury, Ontario, Winnipeg, Manitoba and Edmonton, Alberta. I went to Nanaimo, Port Alberni, Vancouver, Prince George and even to the Yukon. The problem was the same everywhere. All of the workers said that it was their money and that they should be entitled to it when they lose their jobs.

It all comes back to what was said in France. This is the workers' money. I am happy that they are able to get insurance and participate in the economy instead of having to receive social assistance. I tip my hat to France on this one. We need to stop insulting our workers as the previous government and today's government have done by saying that they abuse the system. These are families who are losing their pay, their income. These are children who are living in poverty. There is a good reason why 1.4 million children in this country are hungry. It is because of the previous governments and today's government, the Liberals and the Conservatives. The money should go to the workers immediately.

● (1355)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas on a point of order.

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POINTS OF ORDER

ALLEGATIONS REGARDING THE FORMER MINISTER OF STATE FOR THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am rising on a point of order in an attempt to allow two ministers to correct the public record concerning their recent assertions that the government had referred recent allegations concerning the former minister of state for the status of women to the Ethics Commissioner.

I will start by referring to a Library of Parliament transcript from this morning's CBC radio program, *The Current*, in which the

following exchange between the Ethics Commissioner and host Anna Maria Tremonti took place:

MARY DAWSON: Yes, and I should just clarify that a little bit. I have not had an official request from the Prime Minister to investigate anything relating to [the member for Simcoe—Grey].

ANNA MARIA TREMONTI: Who has requested, then, if he hasn't?

MARY DAWSON: I haven't had any request.

ANNA MARIA TREMONTI: From anyone?

MARY DAWSON: No.

I will send you a copy of this transcript, Madam Speaker, and would happily table it in the House if I received consent. Is there consent to table the document, Madam Speaker?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): There is no consent.

Mr. Bill Siksay: The problem is that this exchange does not seem to agree with the statements of the ministers on this matter. The Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities said the following during question period on Monday:

Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister reported to Canadians this past Friday, allegations came forth from a third party. Those allegations were forwarded to officials at the RCMP and with the Office of the Ethics Commissioner in Ottawa. The RCMP and the Ethics Commissioner will come to their own conclusions, as is proper on the issue.

In response to another question he then said:

When the allegations of the third party arose, our government acted both quickly and appropriately and forwarded them on to both the RCMP and to the Office of the Ethics Commissioner.

In response to another question, he then said:

Mr. Speaker, it was for the very reasons that the member described that the Prime Minister, when he received these allegations, allegations that are unproven to him or anyone else, referred these allegations to the Royal—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but as it is 2 o'clock, and I had been told it would be a very short intervention, he may continue his intervention after question period.

Mr. Mike Wallace: It is not a point of order; it is debate.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It is 2 o'clock.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I believe it is best to pursue this point of order after question period, because there is little time to either rule on it or to give it any consideration.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Madam Speaker, to clarify matters before question period, I think would be helpful for the entire House, and it would be a quick clarification. The Prime Minister has been—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): As it is 2 o'clock and there is limited time for statements by members, we must begin. The hon. member for Calgary Centre.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS***[English]***THE ECONOMY**

Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am proud to have represented Canada earlier this spring at the Jeddah Economic Forum in Saudi Arabia where I spoke about Canada's perspectives on the worldwide economic recession and our goals for the G20 summit in Canada this summer.

Canada is leading the recovery. The leadership and economic foresight of our Prime Minister are evident in several key areas, including reducing Canada's debt by \$38 billion over three years, significantly reducing the taxes of Canadians, the strength of our banking system, Canada's economic action plan, and our continued pursuit of free trade while avoiding damaging protectionism.

Canada is an example to other nations. Our foresight and sound economic strategy have made us a global leader and the natural choice as the host of the G20 and president of this year's G8 summit.

Although there are still uncertain times ahead, Canadians can take pride in our progress while looking forward to an even stronger economic future.

* * *

• (1400)

ROBERT ATTERSLEY

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Robert “Bob” Attersley, who was an Olympic medallist and Whitby's longest serving mayor, passed away recently after a brief illness.

It has been written that he could have been a professional hockey player because he was that good. Instead, he chose business and politics and his community was richer for it.

Bob Attersley, who grew up in Oshawa, first won Whitby's heart as a young hockey hero. He scored the winning goal for the Whitby Dunlops against the Russians during the World Championship Hockey Tournament in 1958, and was an Olympic silver medallist with the Kitchener-Waterloo Dutchmen in 1960.

During his nearly 30-year political career, he served as councillor, deputy reeve, mayor and was a member of the Shriners/Jesters and Rotary Club as well as numerous boards and commissions.

Bob, according to his wife of 55 wonderful years, was a loving husband, father and grandfather. Joan went on to say, “Bob was the most positive person I ever met. He loved life, his friends, everything he did. He saw the best in everyone”. Those of us who knew him would agree.

I am sure that all members of this House will join me in extending condolences to the Attersley family on the passing of this great Canadian.

*[Translation]***WORLD MARCH OF WOMEN**

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I recently met with two representatives of women's centres in Berthier—Maskinongé—Avec des elles in Saint-Gabriel-de-Brandon and the Centre des femmes L'Héritage in Louiseville—to discuss the demands of the third World March of Women, which is taking place from March 8 to October 17, 2010.

These women are calling on the Liberal government to guarantee women's right to decide whether or not to have children, which means maintaining and improving free, accessible abortion services. They also condemn the violence done to women during armed conflict.

They are asking Canada to sign the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and implement the rights set out in the declaration, especially those of indigenous women and children. Lastly, they are demanding that the federal government recognize that water is a basic right and must be excluded from NAFTA.

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*[English]***AT THE TABLE CAMPAIGN**

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this summer the eyes of the world will be focused on Canada as we host the G8 and G20 summits. Decisions at these and other global summits in 2010 will be critical to the future of life on our planet.

Canadian civil society partners have created the At the Table campaign to ensure that the voices of Canadians and citizens around the world are heard at the tables of the G8 and the G20.

At the Table has identified three key priorities: poverty and inequality, climate change, and the global economy. These are issues close to my heart and the hearts of all my NDP colleagues as we have fought hard to see the millennium development goals realized and our international climate change obligations realized.

Congratulations to the civil society partners in this innovative campaign. Together we will be louder and stronger, and governments around the world will have to listen.

* * *

KITCHENER-WATERLOO CITIZEN OF THE YEAR

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Rosemary Smith as the 2009 Citizen of the Year for Kitchener-Waterloo. This prestigious award, presented by the Lions Club, acknowledges the contributions of outstanding leaders in our community.

Rosemary is the CEO of the Kitchener and Waterloo Community Foundation, an organization that encourages charitable giving and supports local programs and initiatives. The foundation benefits the people of our region and helps to make Kitchener-Waterloo the best place to live, work and raise a family.

Statements by Members

As a long-time leader and community builder, Rosemary's commitment to Kitchener-Waterloo has made a lasting difference. She is an inspiration, reminding us that we can all play a role in making our communities more healthy, vibrant and prosperous.

I ask all members to please join me in saluting Rosemary Smith and recognizing the important contributions of all community leaders.

* * *

• (1405)

GIRL GUIDES

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, April 10, I had the pleasure of attending a celebration of 100 years of guiding with the East York Girl Guides in my riding of Beaches—East York. The event was held on the 100th day of 2010, marking the great achievements and history of the Girl Guides over the past 100 years.

Hundreds of thousands of girls and young women have learned new skills, improved leadership abilities and developed long-lasting friendships with their fellow guiders. Through the Girl Guides, they have been able to tackle new challenges and learn more about the world around them and helping others.

The Girl Guides fund raise annually by selling Girl Guide cookies to support their activities. This year the guides in my community put together a cookbook with more than 300 recipes. Funds raised from this cookbook will go toward paying for a 100th anniversary adventure in the summer of 2010 for 22 Girl Guides and 7 guiders. The trip will start off in London, England where guiding began nearly 100 years ago, and then visit six Scandinavian countries. These young guides will go out in this new adventure, meet new friends and fellow guides along the way.

I want to congratulate all Girl Guides celebrating 100 years of guiding this year.

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BURLINGTON BUSINESS EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week the Burlington Chamber of Commerce and the Burlington Economic Development Corporation hosted their 2009 Business Excellence Awards.

I would like to express my congratulations to the following winners: the Young Entrepreneur award went to Mr. Neil Madden of ECS Coffee. The Service Industry award went to Karp Namisniak Yamamoto Architects. The Manufacturer award went to Eco Waste Solutions. Mountain Equipment Co-op won the Retail/Wholesale award. Exotic Woods Inc. won the Small Business Award. CPC Pumps International won the New Business Investment award. The Business Expansion award went to Cogeco Cable Canada. The Business Exports award went to Xiris Automation and the Tourism Ambassador award went to Mr. Ako Matsubayashi. The Mayor's Community Service award went to Pepperwoods Restaurants and Burlington Professional Firefighters Association.

I thank all the winners and all the nominees for making Burlington a stronger place to do business and a fantastic community in which to live and raise a family.

* * *

[*Translation*]

TAXATION

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, although it claims otherwise, this government is unquestionably a friend to the wealthy in this world who avoid taxes.

The Conservatives are constantly asking people in the middle class to tighten their belts, and they are reluctant to help the unemployed, yet in their latest budget they were quick to abolish the withholding tax for some non-resident companies that sell their assets in Canada. According to many experts, this will open the door to tax evasion.

This government has to stop always asking taxpayers for more and put in place the measures proposed by the Bloc Québécois, eliminating tax havens, taking back the gifts they give the oil companies and imposing a surtax on individuals who earn more than \$150,000 a year.

* * *

[*English*]

FAIRNESS AT THE PUMPS ACT

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to standing up for Canadian consumers. From product safety legislation to the lowering of the GST, this government has made major advances in the best interests of consumers.

Consumers must be confident in the accuracy of measurement-based transactions such as filling up their tanks at the gas pump. When Canadians pull into a station to gas up, they want to know that what is calculated on the pump is exactly what is in the tank.

That is why today, the Minister of Industry has brought forward legislation to ensure that Canadians are getting what they paid for. The fairness at the pumps act would make retailers more accountable for the accuracy of their pumps and other measuring devices through mandatory inspections and increased fines.

While the opposition leaps at any opportunity to raise consumers' taxes, our government is working to ensure Canadians are confident where it means the most, at the gas pumps.

* * *

LIBERAL PARTY POLICIES

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday the finance minister's parliamentary secretary finally revealed why Canadian banks held up so well during the recession. His explanation was, "Accolades to the Liberals. The Liberals made sure that we kept regulations in place that kept our banks strong".

Statements by Members

He was of course referring to the Liberal Party whose foresight saw our banking sector through a financial crisis that the Conservatives did not even see coming. He was referring to the Liberals who balanced nine straight budgets, not the Conservatives who turned those surpluses into deficits. He was referring to the Liberals who reduced EI premiums for 13 straight years, not the Conservatives who are hiking them and taxing Canadians more for the privilege of working. He was referring to the same Liberals who in 1993 inherited an 11% unemployment rate and brought it down to 6%, not the Conservatives who ran it back up to 8%.

I agree with the parliamentary secretary. Accolades to the Liberals.

* * *

• (1410)

LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been a year since the Liberal leader revealed clearly to all why he calls himself a tax-and-spend Liberal. That is when he stated that if he were prime minister he would “have to raise taxes”. Of course, this is the same Liberal leader who has mused about raising the GST and has bragged that he was the first Liberal to propose a carbon tax on everything. His latest tax hike promise is to raise job-killing business taxes.

It seems that no tax hike is off the table for the tax-and-spend Liberal leader. Thankfully, our Conservative government firmly believes that lower taxes fuel job creation and economic growth. That is why, since forming government, we have cut taxes for families, businesses and individuals, including reducing the GST by 2%.

We are proud of this job-creating, growth-promoting, low-tax record.

* * *

POLAND

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on this National Day of Mourning, we stand together with the people of Poland to mark a tragedy of unspeakable dimensions and to honour the lives of so many Polish people lost on April 10. On behalf of my colleagues, I offer our heartfelt condolences to the people of Poland and Polish people the world over, including the one million Canadians of Polish descent.

I know from many of the 40,000 Polish Canadians in Manitoba the depth of grief being felt. The loss of 96 people, including President Lech Kaczynski and his wife, along with Polish political, military and civil society leaders, is a tragedy that has taken loved ones from their families but has also taken from an entire country the hopes, ideals and aspirations that its citizens entrusted to its political representatives.

I can only imagine the sense of loss and grief being felt, but having been on a recent visit to Poland, I know that the faith, courage and perseverance the people of Poland have held on to for over 1,000 years of adversity will be a source of strength for them now.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to this grieving Polish nation.
Czesc ich pamieci.

* * *

[*Translation*]

LEADER OF THE BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, Calgary and Edmonton; tomorrow, Vancouver. That is where the Leader of the Bloc Québécois will finish his cross-Canada tour. Come to think of it, as long as he is in Edmonton, the Bloc leader might as well go to Fort McMurry to see how his stocks and his portfolio are doing.

Since the Bloc leader claims to defend Quebec's interests, it is rather worrisome that he must travel around Canada to convince Canadians to separate from Quebec. This is definitely proof that Quebecers are no longer interested in sovereignty.

While the Bloc leader is gallivanting around, we are here working hard to stimulate the economy. Since the economy and jobs are clearly not a priority for the Bloc leader, Quebecers can count on the Conservative government's solid, stable economic leadership.

* * *

POLAND

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in solidarity with the people of Poland and in memory of their president, His Excellency Lech Kaczynski, and the first lady, Maria, who both died tragically last Saturday in a plane crash, today has been declared a national day of mourning.

The Polish president died in sad and devastating circumstances. Ninety-five other people, most of them Polish government officials—members of parliament, senators, military generals and senior public servants—also lost their lives. They were all on their way to commemorate the massacre of 20,000 Polish soldiers by the Soviet army 70 years ago.

My Bloc Québécois colleagues and I would like to express our solidarity, not only with the people of Poland who are mourning the loss of their president, but also the Polish diaspora. We would also like to express our sincere condolences to the family and friends of the deceased.

* * *

• (1415)

[*English*]

POLAND

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the thoughts and prayers of Canadians are with the people of Poland who suffered the tragic loss of 97 brave souls in a plane crash last weekend.

In my hometown of Regina, I think of city councillor, John Findura; the Polish veterans who gather at the Legion; Superior Court judges; Polish cultural groups just now preparing for a mosaic festival; and more.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Polish roots run deep in Canadian soil, and we share in the grief of the Polish people.

[English]

It is all the more acute because of the poignant link to the infamous Katyn massacre of 70 years ago.

On this national day of mourning in Canada, let Polish people everywhere know how profoundly Canadians share their grief, how deeply we respect the memory of President Kaczynski, the first lady and all of the other victims, and how our great confidence in the future of Poland is anchored securely in the indomitable spirit of that great nation.

* * *

POLAND

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, Canada stands with Poland in mourning the tragic loss of President Lech Kaczynski, his wife, the first lady, and numerous other leading lights of Polish society. This unimaginable event shocked the world.

It is made all the more depressing and poignant by the fact that the president and his delegation were on their way to Katyn, Russia, to commemorate another national tragedy where over 22,000 of Poland's best and brightest were brutally murdered 70 years ago.

On behalf of all Canadians, the Prime Minister declared today to be a national day of mourning. He will also take part in the special memorial service with the Polish Canadian community in Mississauga this evening.

Today, those who died are in our thoughts and our prayers. We stand in solidarity with the Polish people during this very difficult and sad time.

ORAL QUESTIONS*[Translation]***AFGHANISTAN**

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of National Defence. Each day, new and disturbing allegations come up regarding the treatment of Afghan detainees. These issues, which are serious and hard on Canada's reputation, have yet to be resolved.

Considering all these events and allegations, why is a public inquiry not launched to go to the bottom of this issue?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the key word in the hon. member's question was "allegations".

In fact, what we heard yesterday was that a witness before the committee made allegations and when specifically asked about those allegations said that he had no specific evidence to support the claims. In fact, it was the hon. member who posed questions to him that elicited that response.

When specifically asked if he had even been in the area when the alleged incidents occurred, he said "No".

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it will not do to not recognize the seriousness of the allegations that were made by the individual yesterday.

I am hearing a lot of heckling on the other side. All I can say is that it simply will not do to dismiss it. The minister cannot dismiss Mr. Gosselin, Mr. Anderson and, with respect to the minister, continue to dismiss Mr. Colvin.

There is no other place for these allegations to go except for a proper public inquiry. That is the only place these questions can be resolved. It is the only way it can be done.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nor can the hon. member or anyone else continue to dismiss the testimony of senior members of the military and the diplomatic corps.

What I would suggest is that each and every time there have been specific allegations presented on this subject matter, the Canadian Forces investigates. That was reinforced yesterday in a statement from the Chief of the Defence Staff, Walt W. J. Natynczyk. Each and every time there are specific allegations, appropriate officials take appropriate action.

• (1420)

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is precisely because there are different accounts of the same event that we need to have some place to go to get the contradictions resolved. That is precisely why we need an inquiry.

At the Military Police Complaints Commission, the presiding officer cannot even see the documents that the witnesses can see and the lawyers for the government can see. How will that individual resolve these questions? A public inquiry is the only way to get to the bottom of these questions.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a barrister and solicitor, as is the hon. member, as a former member of SIRC, somebody supposedly well-versed in the handling of confidential information that could impact national security, the hon. member surely knows that there is this little curious thing called substantiated evidence that has to enter into the fact of the examination.

When specific allegations are brought forward, we have forums, investigations and the ability to look into them. However, in yesterday's testimony, there was no specific evidence offered, by the witness' own admission.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is only before a judge that allegations turn into evidence and that is why we cannot dismiss Mr. Colvin, Mr. Anderson, Mr. Gosselin, Mr. Mulgarai and a number of memos that all point to a systematic transfer of prisoners to risk of torture and for rendition, and allegations of innocent civilians being sent to the NDS for further questioning.

Yesterday there was an allegation of a teen being shot in the head.

Oral Questions

If General Natynczyk can call an inquiry overnight and has the courage to do that right away, then why the cowardice on the part of the government and not a public inquiry?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the emotion on the part of the hon. member but the reality is that we need specific allegations to take specific action. When that happens, the Canadian Forces will follow that evidence each and every time. The Chief of the Defence Staff indicated that yesterday.

With respect to testimony heard yesterday, and the hon. member was there, when the witness was specifically asked if he had firsthand accounts, proof that this happened, he said “No”.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the witness yesterday said that he was at the point of transfer of prisoners to the risk of torture, particularly for rendition to the NDS. Now a former cultural adviser, a translator, accuses the current government of transferring a sick prisoner to the NDS, despite the fact that the NDS was prepared to have him shot and justify it.

The government is mired deep in lies, in scandal and in cover-up. When will it shed its cowardice? When will it have the courage to put these allegations from the generals, from the translator, from Colvin, from Anderson, to a sitting judge so we can have some proof?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, more rhetoric, more sound and fury, more unsubstantiated allegations that the hon. member, who is a lawyer, a former premier, is getting very good at. His theatrics are noted.

I wish, just for once, we would get a question from the hon. member that would reflect an acknowledgement that the men and women of the Canadian Forces continue to do great work on behalf of our country, at great risk to themselves and their families. He should stop disparaging their name, their work and stop making allegations, insinuating they are war criminals. That is despicable, detestable ethics.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ETHICS

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, new allegations shed some more light on the reasons why the former minister for the status of women was expelled from the Conservative caucus. Apparently, some pictures show her and her husband mingling with prostitutes at a party, where cocaine was used.

Instead of hiding, will the Prime Minister confirm that these are indeed the allegations that were forwarded to the RCMP?

• (1425)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when these allegations were brought to our attention, we did what we had to do and forwarded them to the appropriate authorities, so that they would take the required and necessary actions.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in addition to these disturbing allegations, which raise the risk of being blackmailed, it is claimed that three numbers for bogus corporations were

reserved for them in Belize—a well-known tax haven—and could be used to engage in tax evasion and influence peddling.

Will the Prime Minister show transparency and confirm that these are indeed the allegations that were forwarded to the RCMP?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, the Prime Minister behaved like a statesman. He took the action that he had to take. He forwarded the allegations to those who normally deal with these issues. That is what he did. Now, if the opposition member has allegations to make, he should bring them to the attention of those who are responsible for taking appropriate action.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister claimed that he referred the file of the former minister for the status of women, but the ethics commissioner states that she received no formal request and she feels that she does not have enough information to launch an inquiry.

The Prime Minister, who claimed to be disturbed by the allegations targeting his minister, does not seem in a hurry to shed light on this issue.

Instead of constantly trying to hide things, why does the government not release the information it has, so that the appropriate authorities can do their job?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said in this place on Monday, serious allegations were brought to the Prime Minister's attention. He forwarded them to the RCMP. He also forwarded them to the independent Ethics Commissioner. He gave the contact information of where she could go to find additional information. She has the authority. She said, just yesterday, on the CBC, “I have also got the power to self-initiate if I feel I've got reasonable grounds”.

Rather than keeping her in the dark, the Prime Minister did forward on the concerns that were brought to his attention.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in addition to releasing all the information that he has, the Prime Minister must tell us what he personally did to shed light on this matter. For example, a private detective suggested that the minister may have taken advantage of an official trip to Belize, in July 2008, to set up three bogus companies in that tax haven.

Did the Prime Minister's Office take basic steps to check this information, or any other information provided by this investigator?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, they were brought forward to the Prime Minister. What did he do? He immediately referred them to the RCMP. He immediately referred the issue to the independent arm's-length Ethics Commissioner. He acted responsibly, he acted quickly and he acted with high ethical standards.

Oral Questions

Quite frankly, the Prime Minister did the right thing.

* * *

[*Translation*]

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning we learned that the warnings about torture did not reach the military police commander. This shows a lack of commitment, an unwillingness to properly follow up on the Afghan detainees transferred by Canada.

The testimony from the Afghan interpreter clearly shows that the NDS routinely uses torture. Everyone knows this.

So why the failure? Why were the warnings not received?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is false. We know that when Canadian Forces have substantiated evidence, they act. They follow up these allegations.

What we heard yesterday was just that. It was allegations. When pressed, when asked specifically to present evidence that could be followed, the witness admitted that he had no specific evidence to offer. They were allegations that he could not substantiate. That is what we are dealing with here.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the allegations made yesterday were very serious. They were made by a former translator for the Canadian Forces. They are allegations about the chain of command and about ministers as well.

He said that it was common knowledge that prisoners transferred to the Afghan authorities were tortured. Everybody knew, everybody knows that this is what was happening and is happening.

It cannot be cleared up by the government investigating itself. Therefore, when are we going to get the action that is required, a full inquiry? Our troops deserve better than what we are getting here today.

• (1430)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our troops certainly deserve better than drive-by smears, allegations, non-specific references to their performance.

I want to be clear. When the Canadian Forces have specific information or allegations, they act, they follow all international obligations, they certainly follow the Geneva convention. They are doing an exceptional job in difficult circumstances. This is a very challenging mission for those members and their families.

I just wish the hon. member would show a little more support for what they do.

* * *

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, everybody in this chamber supports our troops. That member should understand that and realize it.

When the Prime Minister was in opposition, here is what he used to say, and he said this with a certain energy, “There is no more

important job than cleaning up government and bringing accountability back to Ottawa”. Those were the days.

The Conservatives are refusing to have an inquiry on the issue of torture in Afghanistan. They are refusing to tell us why they have called the RCMP on one of their own. And requests for information of the government take an eternity to get filled, if ever.

When will we get the accountability the Conservatives used to boast about?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government's first order of business when the House convened was to bring in the Federal Accountability Act. We banned money from politics. We brought in the largest expansion of access to information.

When we tried to put a little light on the Canadian Wheat Board, the NDP stood up to put a cloak of darkness. Where there was darkness, we brought light. We overruled the NDP, and we have a lot to be proud of when it comes to accountability.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ETHICS

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are getting caught up in their contradictions. The former minister's lawyer said that she was not informed of the allegations, but the Prime Minister's Office is saying the opposite.

The Prime Minister claims to have referred the allegations to the Ethics Commissioner, but the commissioner says that she learned about them from the newspapers. It seems that the minister and her husband abused departmental resources: BlackBerry, limousine, chauffeur, parliamentary office.

What is holding the Prime Minister back? Why not formally refer the situation to the Ethics Commissioner?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, serious allegations were brought to his attention. What did he do? He did the responsible thing. He did the ethical thing. He immediately referred these allegations to the relevant authorities so that they, on behalf of Canadians, could independently look into these situations.

That is the honourable thing. That is the ethical thing. The Prime Minister did the right thing.

Oral Questions

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the red flags should have gone up last September when Mr. Jaffer was charged with cocaine possession. One does not buy cocaine at one's local pharmacy. One has to have an illegal source. Did the government learn nothing from the Julie Couillard affair?

Why did the Prime Minister not order an enhanced security check of his minister months ago, at the first suggestion that her husband was in contact with people with criminal connections?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the allegations made by the member opposite are quite preposterous.

Let me be very clear. Last Thursday evening, serious allegations were brought to the attention of the Prime Minister. He acted immediately. He brought the issue to the RCMP. He also notified the Ethics Commissioner.

He acted responsibly. He acted ethically. He acted expeditiously. The Prime Minister did the right thing.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 2008, when the former status of women minister represented foreign affairs, she went on a government-funded trip to Belize. On the trip, she met with those at the highest levels of power. However, according to media reports, it is alleged by the Prime Minister's own informant that the minister and Mr. Jaffer also had questionable private business interests in Belize.

Will the government assist a police investigation and proactively release all details of everyone the minister met during her trip to Belize?

• (1435)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if we want to talk about proactive, the minute this information was brought to the Prime Minister's attention, he acted ethically. He acted responsibly. He did the right thing. He referred the entire matter to the RCMP. It is the competent authority to conduct this investigation, and this government will co-operate fully in that investigation should it choose to undertake one.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister was not the only familiar face on that Belize trip. Mr. Jaffer also accompanied her and participated in official ministerial events.

Given that he was still an MP and Conservative caucus chair at the time, did the government pay for Mr. Jaffer's travel and does it have detailed records of who he met with while in Belize?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the authorities in these matters is the RCMP. The Prime Minister has forwarded all the information that he learned last Thursday evening on to the RCMP so it can conduct an independent investigation.

The Prime Minister's ethical conduct in this matter has been beyond reproach. He acted ethically, he acted immediately and he did the right thing.

[*Translation*]

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government's version of events in the Afghan detainee scandal is falling apart. An Afghan-Canadian interpreter has confirmed that when Canadian soldiers thought detainees were lying, they would turn them over to the Afghan security service for Afghan-style questioning, which meant torture. In short, we contracted out torture.

How could the government claim that the 2007 protocol was working well when the incidents reported by this interpreter took place more than a year after that protocol was put in place?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, nothing was confirmed. It was alleged.

Let us be clear. Each and every time in these instances, Canadian Forces leadership can only transfer prisoners if they are satisfied on the ground that there is no real risk that a transferred prisoner would be subjected to torture or mistreatment. That is the standard they meet.

I just wish the hon. member would raise his standards a little in his questioning.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like the minister to raise his standards too, so that there is more transparency in the House on this issue.

The Afghan interpreter also says that Canadian troops killed an Afghan youth. What did the troops do? They went into a village, arrested 10 innocent people and turned them over to be tortured.

Instead of ignoring these summary arrests, what is the government waiting for to step up to the plate and do the only thing it can do, which is to call a public inquiry?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, more feigned righteous indignation.

What the witness did say yesterday was that he was not there. He did not see it. He was not around the area when this alleged incident occurred, so it was of course unsubstantiated. When we have substantial evidence or information, we act. But that member and others opposite like to wrap their arms selectively around what witnesses say.

What I heard the witness say yesterday was that each and every member of the Canadian Forces, from the top generals to the men and women on the ground, was a liar. If that is not disparaging their reputation, then I do not know what is. I would be very loath, if I were a member opposite, to associate myself with comments like that.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in spite of the new agreement that was supposed to solve all the problems with transfers of Afghan detainees, Canada kept on handing over Afghan detainees, who were often innocent, to be tortured. Diplomat Nicholas Gosselin documented at least eight cases of torture between January and August 2008.

How can the government claim to have done its duty when the torture of detainees who were transferred to the Afghan authorities never stopped?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is astounding to me is that repeatedly we see members opposite completely wrapping their arms around these broad statements of unspecified, unsubstantiated evidence.

What we did as a government in 2007, after inheriting a mission put in place by the previous government and inheriting a flawed transfer agreement, was to put a new agreement in place that allowed for more mentoring, more monitoring. I am told now, in fact, that public safety officials have been able to go to those prisons more than 200 times, were able to improve their professionalism and work on the infrastructure.

It is not perfect, but it is far better than it was when we inherited this mission.

• (1440)

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether the minister heard the witnesses who, according to him, made unsubstantiated allegations. He might want to try really listening to them.

Mr. Gosselin's reports were never turned over to the military police complaints commission. They are probably too incriminating for the government. Because the government's negligence and mismanagement are at the heart of this affair, the public should have access to all the documents, in their original, uncensored version.

When will the government show some transparency? When will it stop—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know where the hon. member has been, but the government has indicated that it will make available all legally available documents.

We have asked Mr. Justice Iacobucci to conduct an independent, comprehensive review of all the documents. We are cooperating with the MPCC. Those members should let the commission and Justice Iacobucci do their work.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and the Minister of the Environment both admit to

having met with Mr. Jaffer to discuss his request for government cash. Allegations now surface that might explain why, allegations that the former Conservative caucus chair and then status of women minister needed cash or low-interest government loans to boost the value of phony offshore companies hidden in the tax haven of Belize.

Given the growing list of serious and troubling allegations, it is critical that the government turn over these funding requests. Will it, and when?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the specific allegations that are before the House, neither the Minister of the Environment nor the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities provided any grant for the issue in question.

The member opposite should be ashamed of himself.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the minister should be ashamed of is hiding the truth from Canadians, refusing to reveal these allegations and refusing to report these meetings when they happened.

We know the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities has the funding requests. He told the media, "I've got the paperwork right in front of me".

With a growing cloud of allegations, including cocaine use, phony offshore companies, tax evasion, escorts, abuse of public trust by a minister while in cabinet, can the Prime Minister not see that he makes matters so much worse by hiding what he knows? Will he simply come clean and tell us the facts, or is he going to prorogue again?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was this government that set up an independent lobbying commissioner, so if the member opposite has any specific allegations to make, he can make them to that independent officer of Parliament.

The member opposite could also make allegations without parliamentary immunity. He could go outside and repeat the outrageous claims he just made, but I suspect that when it comes to that member, once again he will not have the guts.

* * *

[Translation]

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has become very clear that the Prime Minister wants to keep Canadians in the dark. He has decided to impose a culture of secrecy and to govern against the will of Canadians by covering up the truth.

Thirteen departments received below average marks or completely ignored the access to information deadlines set out in the legislation. The Conservatives want to hide what they are doing to our country in order to cling to power, which is anti-democratic.

Will they admit that their promise to be transparent was absolutely meaningless?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is committed to transparency and openness for Canadians.

We appreciate the advice that the information commissioner gave to us. We recognize there is room for improvement and we are taking steps to improve.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Information Commissioner is talking about systematic censorship. Entire pages are being censored, which demonstrates the Prime Minister's wilful blindness regarding the torture. He even shut down Parliament in order to duck the issue.

Rights & Democracy, the muzzling of scientists, cuts to climatologists' funding, the behaviour of ministers, and the list goes on. It is official: this government is in the dark ages. Why does the Prime Minister insist on maintaining this culture of secrecy?

• (1445)

[English]

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, we appreciate the comments made by the information commissioner.

Decisions regarding access to information are made by professionals in the civil service. Ministers do not involve themselves in these decisions.

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GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, having spent numerous years in retail sales, I know that when Canadians pull into a station to gas up, they want to know that what is calculated on the pumps is exactly what is in their tanks.

Our government has always remained committed to standing up for Canadian consumers. From product safety legislation to the lowering of the GST, the government has made major advances in the best interests of consumers.

Could the parliamentary secretary today please inform the House what is being done to further protect Canadian consumers?

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): In fact, Mr. Speaker, I can. Consumers must be confident in the accuracy of measurement-based transactions such as filling up their tanks at the gas pumps, since this directly affects the health of our economy.

That is why today the Minister of Industry brought forward legislation to ensure Canadians are getting what they pay for. The fairness at the pumps act will make retailers more accountable for the accuracy of their pumps and other measuring devices through mandatory inspections and fines.

While the opposition continues to propose increasing taxes to consumers, our government is working to ensure Canadians are getting what they pay for at the gas pumps.

*[Translation]***ETHICS**

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government's culture of secrecy is well established. The new independent member learned her lesson so well in cabinet that she apparently decided to hide her money in Belize.

If these allegations are true, if the former Conservative minister did evade taxes, that is a very serious crime. That tarnishes not only the government, but all members in the House.

My question is simple: can the Prime Minister tell the House if he is aware of his former minister's tax evasion activities?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member says, "if these allegations are true". I do not know whether they are true. The Prime Minister does not know whether they are true, and the member opposite does not know whether they are true.

That is why the Prime Minister did the right thing and referred this matter to the RCMP. They are the ones who conduct an independent review. They are the ones who can launch an investigation if they choose. It is their responsibility.

The member opposite is a distinguished lawyer. For him to stand in this place and come to conclusions based on media reports is quite outrageous.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): It is that government, Mr. Speaker, that threw the former minister out of the cabinet and threw her out of its caucus. That was their responsibility and their responsibility is to tell us why.

Not since the former Liberal Prime Minister had his fleet of ships under the flag of a foreign land has a member of this House been implicated in a scheme to avoid paying their fair share of taxes. That is an insult to all taxpayers in this country and all citizens of this country.

Why can the Prime Minister not stand in his place and tell us this is an unethical practice, one that he will condemn under any circumstances?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, serious allegations were brought forward to the attention of the Prime Minister. He did the right thing. He immediately said, "I can't be the judge. I can't be the jury. I can't be the executioner". He referred the matter to the relevant authorities so that they can conduct an independent review. That was appropriate. That was ethical. The Prime Minister did the right thing.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Information Commissioner is criticizing the Conservative government's lack of transparency. Half a dozen or so departments have received a failing grade and the Department of Foreign Affairs, which is hiding the truth behind the Afghan detainee situation, has been placed on red alert. The Commissioner finds that the Prime Minister's control over the entire machinery of government is causing many delays that are inconsistent with the law.

When will this government obey the law and when will it agree to be accountable?

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we thank the Information Commissioner for her advice. The government has processed most requests for information within 30 days. We are working on improving those results.

• (1450)

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Budget Officer maintains that Parliament does not have the necessary information to properly monitor the government's spending as set out in the recent budget. Kevin Page complains that the government is refusing to provide him with a fiscal framework and risk analyses.

Why this blatant lack of transparency and why is this government refusing to give Kevin Page the information he has requested?

[English]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a wonderful question coming from that hon. member. It is your purview, Mr. Speaker, that provides the funding for this officer of the House of Commons who provides critique. I would suggest perhaps it is time for the Parliamentary Budget Officer to go back and ask the Liberal Party what happened to the \$57 billion that was paid by employees and employers in this country. We would like to find that money.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for two years, Noah Kirkman has been held in the United States by a county judge who refuses to send this 12-year-old boy back to his family here in Canada. Calgary Child Services has not declared Mr. Kirkman, Mrs. Kirkman or Noah's grandparents, for that matter, unfit to look after him. For two years, Noah has been bounced back and forth between several foster parents and schools, yet this outrageous judicial detention of a Canadian citizen continues. This case flies in the face of the Hague Convention on returning children to their countries of origin. Can the minister explain when he is prepared to act and how long this travesty will continue?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, consular officials abroad and in Ottawa have been providing consular assistance to the Kirkman family since October 15, 2008. This particular case is in front of the courts. Consular officials abroad and here in Ottawa have

respected and will respect the court orders concerning the minor child. If ordered by the court, consular officials abroad and in Ottawa are ready to assist in the child's return to Canada.

[Translation]

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the problem is that the government has waited two years. Calgary Child Services is no longer in a position to determine what is in the best interest of young Noah. The young boy must immediately be returned to his family. Noah's family needs the government's help to put an end to this charade.

Why have the Conservative government and the hon. member been refusing for two years to help the family and bring young Noah back to Canada?

[English]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very important to note that the child protection agency is responsible for the protection of minor children. Under international law, this is the court in the U.S. A. As the current matter is in front of the courts, we will abide by the court rules. We will continue abiding by the court rules and if ordered by the court, consular officials abroad and in Ottawa are ready to assist in the child's return to Canada.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government's spin on its decision to scrap plans for a Canadian HIV vaccine facility has come unspun. Today the health committee heard more conflicting accounts of how the decision was made, some of it disturbing and implying political interference. We have lost a vital public resource, and Winnipeg, by all accounts the winning bid, will lose a projected 70 high-paying scientific jobs plus spinoffs. Canada's proud HIV research reputation has nose-dived.

Will the government now give us the real reasons for all this damage?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said before, the money is still on the table and we will continue to work with the Gates Foundation to ensure that the money is invested to develop a safe and effective vaccine. As well, an independent study was commissioned by the Gates Foundation that concluded that the facility is unnecessary.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, throughout all this obfuscation, one thing is clear. The government's sudden reversal is a blow to Winnipeg, a blow to Canada, and a blow to the people whose lives depend on a breakthrough in vaccine development.

Will the government at least guarantee that the \$88 million set aside for the vaccine production facility will be invested in Canada, will be used for the acceleration of HIV vaccine development, will be used toward discovery research, will enhance Winnipeg and Canada's world-renowned research capacity in AIDS, will support dual capacities and will, in fact, keep sites—

• (1455)

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Minister of Health.

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said before, the money is still on the table. In addition to refusing to accept the truth as an answer, the wild goose chase by members opposite has now taken the unfortunate turn of questioning the credibility of public health officials.

Once again, we will continue to act on the basis of science and the best interests of taxpayers, regardless of the motivation of those members who want to imply the worst about the hard-working, dedicated officials in order to serve their own political ambitions.

* * *

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, another day, another new tax proposed by the opposition. First it was a carbon tax, then a GST hike, then a job-killing business tax, and now it is a tax on iPods and MP3 players. It is unbelievable.

Yesterday the Liberals joined forces with the NDP and the Bloc to support a new tax that would force consumers to pay up to \$75 on any new audio recording devices. Could the Minister of Canadian Heritage tell the House our government's position regarding this new tax on Canadians?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the vote last night, the Bloc Québécois, the NDP and the Liberals got together and voted in favour of a new tax of up to \$75 for every iPod, every BlackBerry, every cellphone, every computer, and every PVR in this country. It is bad for consumers and it is bad for creators.

There is nobody in full sobriety who can say that it will help musicians, the music industry, the television industry or the movie industry, by making it more expensive for consumers to purchase the products on which they will receive their Canadian content. However, that is what they did. They want higher taxes on consumers. We believe in standing up for taxpayers and standing—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Wascana.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is encouraging to know that the Minister of Indian Affairs is again meeting with representatives at First Nations University, including the new and highly regarded president. Shauneen Pete is a symbol of the change that is happening at FNUC, fixing what was wrong before and securing a better, sustainable future.

The minister knows a one-time federal financial commitment just to August does not constitute a solution. It is a step, but a small one.

Oral Questions

Is the minister at work on a long-term financial plan to extend permanently beyond August?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, we have never stopped meeting with representatives of First Nations University. We are always interested in improving outcomes for first nation and aboriginal learners across the country.

We have already put on the table that there is \$3 million available, but it is a proposal-driven thing. There actually has to be a proposal coming in. When I met again today with the officials, I encouraged them to get that proposal in. We are eager to see that and we are eager to work with them on that. That is sitting there ready to be processed, but we need a proposal.

While they are working hard on the long-term needs of that institution, it sure was not helped by this member and the work that he did not do when he was finance minister.

* * *

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, an international consensus is emerging. Yesterday, the Minister of Finance indicated that Canada was dissenting, and told his G20 colleagues that he did not see the benefit of taxing financial institutions.

Is the minister aware that, in 2009, the after-tax profit of Canadian chartered banks was \$15.6 billion and that in the first quarter of 2010 their after-tax profit totalled \$5.3 billion? Why is the government so afraid of Bay Street?

[English]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said in committee when this hon. member raised that motion, I was not just sure what planet he had been living on through this global financial recession because everyone in Canada knows that we have the strongest financial sector in the world. It is the envy of the world. Not one penny of Canadian taxpayers' dollars went into propping up a bank. Why would we impose a tax on banks when they cause no harm to Canadians?

* * *

[Translation]

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the doors of the Prime Minister's office are wide open for large companies such as Vale Inco.

Oral Questions

The day after the strike began in Sudbury, on July 14, 2009, the Prime Minister's policy director, Paul Wilson, met with Vale Inco representatives.

There have been a total of 25 meetings since 2008 between government and Vale Inco representatives.

Did the Prime Minister's Office and various ministers discuss the labour conflict with Vale Inco at their meetings or did they ignore the reality?

• (1500)

[English]

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know about the meetings that the hon. member is talking about. However, we do continue to monitor this situation. We evaluate, of course, under the Investment Canada Act, equality to proposed reductions throughout the entire enterprise.

Vale Inco had announced temporary shutdowns in other parts of the world and has not targeted Canada. We see Vale Inco planning to stay invested in Canada in the long-term, but of course we will continue to monitor the situation.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the Liberal leader continually pushes for higher taxes, our Conservative government is focused on supporting our economic growth and happy to create new jobs. Canada's economic action plan is a positive plan to protect Canada's economy and to prepare for the opportunities of tomorrow, and it is working. Just today, Statistics Canada reported that Canada fared better in this recession than in previous ones and is in the best position in the G7.

Would the parliamentary secretary please tell this House what else is being said about Canada's economy?

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Saint John for raising this important issue.

Once again proof today that our Conservative government's economic action plan is providing real leadership. What we are hearing and what we have said all along is that Canada holds one of the best positions economically in the entire world.

Last week, OECD forecasted Canada's economic growth by a wide margin to lead the G7. KPMG lined up with that, saying that we have become the most competitive industrialized country on the jobs sector.

We are accomplishing what we have set out to do.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations and First Nations University have undertaken a lot of change: a new board of governors; a new CEO; a new president; a new governance agreement with the University of Regina; a sensible, sustainable

business plan; and the renewed support of the Canadian Association of University Teachers and the Saskatchewan government. They have all turned the page.

Will the Government of Canada constructively join the team long-term for the sake of hundreds of young lives which otherwise might not get a chance?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is important to realize that of all the first nation learners in the country, less than 5% attend First Nations University. It is not fair to say that first nations people are going to be on the ropes. Ninety-five per cent plus find other ways to get a post-secondary education.

But, more important, when I talked to the chief and the president again today, there is no business plan with a single number in it, not a dollar, not a number in it, yet. They are still working on that. There is no agreement signed with the University of Regina, yet. Nor is there any proposal before us, yet, asking for a single dollar.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in budget 2010, the current government announced \$10 million in funding to address the tragedy of the hundreds of murdered and missing aboriginal women in Canada. It has been over a month since that announcement and still the current government has failed to be forthcoming in regard to when and how moneys will be distributed.

The Native Women's Association of Canada has been the only group to provide evidence of the number of missing and murdered aboriginal women and is the most appropriate group to do the essential future work.

When will the current government commit to funding a second phase of Sisters in Spirit?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think we are all delighted in this House that our government committed \$10 million in the budget to address this issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women. That was a great step forward.

Our government has also signed an agreement to take the next series of projects forward called "evidence to action". It is building on a Sisters in Spirit research project that was done so well by NWAC.

We look forward to working with NWAC and other aboriginal groups, and individual aboriginal women as we get to the bottom of not only the missing and murdered aboriginal women but making life better for aboriginal women from coast to coast.

Business of the House

• (1505)

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the government House leader would describe the agenda that he has in mind for the rest of this week and next week. In his answer, I wonder if he could follow up on a comment made in the Standing Committee on Official Languages by the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities indicating that it is the government's intention to introduce a bill on Air Canada's compliance with the Official Languages Act.

Could the government House leader indicate when that legislation is likely to be tabled in the House of Commons?

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to reply to my hon. colleague, the House leader of the official opposition, as to the business of the House for the remainder of this week and into next week.

Today I hope to conclude the debate at second reading of Bill C-9, the jobs and economic growth act. The budget implementation act is a very important legislation. We have heard a lot of debate about it in the Chamber. I am very pleased that we are getting our message out about all the good things we are doing to help sustain jobs and create new jobs in our country.

The next bill I intend to call following Bill C-9 is Bill C-5, the international transfer of offenders act.

Next week we will continue with the business of this week with the addition of Bill C-4, Sébastien's law, and Bill C-13, fairness for military families act.

Tuesday, April 20, next week, shall be an allotted day.

As for the hon. opposition House leader's inquiry about specific pieces of legislation, all I would ask is that he be patient. We are bringing forward a lot of legislation. All of it is excellent legislation that I know he can hardly wait to support.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order to bring to your attention what I believe was unparliamentary language used by the member for Vancouver South today during question period.

In the member's question for the Minister of National Defence, the member for Vancouver South accused the government of lying and of exhibiting cowardice with respect to the detainee issue. In my view that was extremely unparliamentary.

Mr. Speaker, I would point out that in your ruling of last year, when you shared with the House your three determinants on considering whether or not unparliamentary language was used, you said that you considered the tone, the content of the question and whether or not the House was disrupted because of the question.

I would suggested to you, Mr. Speaker, that in this case the tone was highly inflammatory, the content was confrontational and, of course, there was the resulting disruption. I would ask you to advise the member for Vancouver South to immediately withdraw his remarks and, if he refuses to do so, Mr. Speaker, I would ask you to examine the blues and make a ruling in due haste.

The Speaker: I will be pleased to examine the blues and make a ruling in due haste, in compliance with the hon. member's wishes, but I will need to examine it. I think I remember hearing the word but I did not think it was directed to an individual. However, I will certainly double check it.

The hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas was on a point of order before statements by members began at 2 o'clock, so I gather he will want to continue his argument from the sound of it and the fact that he is standing there. I will recognize the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas.

ALLEGATIONS REGARDING THE FORMER MINISTER OF STATE FOR THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will complete my point of order regarding my attempt to allow two ministers to correct the public record concerning the recent assertions that the government had referred recent allegations concerning the former Minister for Status of Women to the Ethics Commissioner. This is in light of the Ethics Commissioner's statement this morning on CBC radio that she had not received an official request from the Prime Minister to relate anything relating to the former minister.

I was giving some examples of how the Minister of Transport had responded to questions in the House on Monday on this issue. In response to another question, he then said:

Mr. Speaker, it was for the very reasons that the member described that the Prime Minister, when he received these allegations, allegations that are unproven to him or anyone else, referred these allegations to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and to the Ethics Commissioner. Those are the independent agencies that are charged with making this type of determination.

Later, in another response to a question, he then said:

Mr. Speaker, when the allegations were brought to the Prime Minister's attention, he moved expeditiously and quickly. He immediately referred them to the two relevant independent authorities, the RCMP and the Office of the Ethics Commissioner. Those authorities will be the ones who will come to conclusions with respect to these matters.

As well, in response to another question, and I am reading from the translation, the Minister of Natural Resources said:

Mr. Speaker, on Friday, we learned of allegations made by a third party. Those allegations were referred to the RCMP and the Ethics Commissioner. The RCMP and the Ethics Commissioner will draw their own conclusions.

Furthermore, later on in question period, the Minister of Natural Resources, in response to another question, said:

When we learned of the allegations we immediately referred the matter to the RCMP and the Ethics Commissioner. They will draw their own conclusions.

I thought it was only fair to allow these ministers an opportunity to correct the record concerning this matter before we continue this discussion. This way, there will be no question of them having misled the House.

Government Orders

• (1510)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments by the member for Burnaby—Douglas. I think he clarified the issue in his last speech. He said that the matter was referred to the Ethics Commissioner. These allegations were brought forward to the Prime Minister. He does not know whether they are true. He does not know whether they warrant an investigation.

Since he did not want to simply sweep these allegations under the rug, he forwarded the allegations and referred them to the Office of the Ethics Commissioner. He said that this individual had come forward and raised some very serious allegations and that he wanted to refer this matter to the Ethics Commissioner. The Ethics Commissioner has the capacity, as she said on CBC this morning, to initiate an investigation proactively if she sees fit.

I understand that the Ethics Commissioner telephoned the third party in question, who then declined to co-operate, which is regrettable, but I think it demonstrates that the Prime Minister acted quickly, appropriately and ethically by not trying to somehow sweep this matter under the rug.

He also referred the matter to the RCMP. He did not ask the RCMP to conduct an investigation because the prime minister in this country does not ask the RCMP to do investigations. There was a matter of concern over serious allegations and he referred them to the RCMP. It is up to the RCMP to make a determination as to whether it does or does not want to open an investigation, just as it is with the Ethics Commissioner.

Again, I want to highlight that it showed that the Prime Minister did the right thing. He acts responsibly. I know the member for Burnaby—Douglas to be a fair and reasonable person. I do think we are splitting hairs. It does underline the Prime Minister's ethics in this matter and that he did the right thing.

The Speaker: I am not sure the situation is one that constitutes a point of order for the House. It appears to be a dispute as to facts or things that may have transpired, but I am not sure it has much to do with the rules of the House of Commons.

Accordingly, I will review the comments made by both the Minister of Transport and the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas and, if necessary, I will get back to the House. However, my suspicion is that we can consider the matter dealt with at this point, but I will have another look.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

JOBS AND ECONOMIC GROWTH ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-9, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 4, 2010 and other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak on behalf of the Bloc Québécois regarding this budget implementation bill. It

is no surprise that the members of the Bloc Québécois will be opposing this bill, just as we opposed this budget tabled by the Conservative government. Unfortunately, I have only ten minutes to explain to my colleagues the reasons why our party is opposed to this budget implementation bill.

The reasons are many, and each of them might require a speech of at least 30 or 40 minutes. But I shall review just a few of them in the time I am allotted. One of the reasons why the Bloc Québécois is opposed to this bill is that it confirms the desire of the Conservative government to spare rich taxpayers at all costs, including the banks and large corporations.

Earlier, during question period, our colleague the hon. member for Hochelaga and Bloc Québécois finance critic was telling us about the astronomical profits made by the banks in recent months. He mentioned profits of \$5.6 billion. When it is time to look for money in the pockets of the middle class and the disadvantaged, governments, and this Conservative government—a government which, by the way, is heartless—have no hesitation about making the middle class, workers and the disadvantaged pay for the deficit.

Another reason why we are not in favour of this bill is that the measures it contains are proof of the above-mentioned desire, since corporations will not be asked to contribute to the government's coffers. It is workers, people who cannot benefit from tax havens, people who work very hard in plants, in factories, in stores, people who often work for minimum wage, that the government will turn to. But unlike the big corporations that benefit from tax deductions, they are taxed from their first penny, and as soon as they build up a little nest egg, the government is immediately upon them with its taxes.

With regard to tax loopholes, it could be said that the government is talking out of both sides of its mouth. On the one hand, the government says that it wants to go after tax havens and, on the other, in this bill, the Conservative government is opening loopholes in the Income Tax Act to make it possible for corporations not registered in Canada to avoid paying their fair share of taxes. It is despicable on the part of the government to take this approach.

Once again in question period, we went back to the former minister of the status of women, now an independent MP, who, according to rumours here and elsewhere on the Hill, allegedly took advantage of a ministerial trip to Belize to open three bogus companies to again avoid paying income tax. We know that Belize is most definitely a tax haven, just like Barbados and certain other islands in the West Indies or some other small countries where corporations can take advantage of tax loopholes.

In Quebec, there have been two cases of flagrant fraud where small investors were literally fleeced. I am referring to the cases of Vincent Lacroix and Earl Jones. The money of the small investors who were swindled was not in the bank accounts of Vincent Lacroix and Earl Jones.

Government Orders

● (1515)

That money was hidden in countries that serve as tax havens. When they have served their sentences—I will remind members that the Bloc had asked for the abolition of release after serving one-sixth of a sentence, but the Conservatives refused—they will get out and collect their money, which is somewhere in the West Indies. They will be able to resume their princely lives, unlike ordinary investors.

There is the case of two young girls who lost their parents in a car accident. The insurance award was managed by the girls' grandfather. They literally lost everything. That is unacceptable and astounding. That is what tax havens are used for. The Bloc Québécois is anxious for the government to assume its responsibilities and ensure that those listening to us, the middle class workers, are not the only ones who pay their fair share of taxes.

There is another point I want to say a little more about. This budget implementation bill will allow the government to dip into the employment insurance fund surplus until 2014-15. Once again, as we have said many times, the employment insurance fund surplus does not belong to the government. It belongs to the workers and employers who pay premiums. In 2008, the fund reached \$1.5 billion and the government cleaned it out. It helped itself to that surplus. That is completely unacceptable.

The Bloc Québécois proposed an independent employment insurance fund that would be jointly managed by workers and employers, similar to the CSST model in Quebec. If there was a surplus in the fund, the board of directors—or whatever it is called—of the independent employment insurance fund could decide which categories of unemployed workers or which categories of workers would benefit from improvements to the plan.

I see my colleague from Manicouagan nodding his head. On the North Shore, in the Lower St. Lawrence, and in Gaspésie, they have to deal with seasonal work. We need to stop calling them seasonal workers. They are not “seasonal workers”; the work is seasonal. Even if they wanted to plant 99 trees and do silvicultural work in the forest when there are several centimetres of snow on the ground in February, it would not be possible. It is rare to have a winter where there is almost no snow on the ground, but either way, the ground is frozen, making it impossible. The fishing industry cannot be forced to operate in February. Charlevoix, in my riding, is a very touristy location. There are inns and beautiful sites. We would love to have the inns full in February, but that will not happen in the winter. Some tourists come to go snowmobiling, but not enough to keep our inns and lodges open year-round. So, employers are forced to shut their businesses down, or those that remain open are forced to cut staff.

With the current EI system, which is totally unfair to seasonable workers, these people are forced to experience periods of unemployment on a regular basis. That is not their choice; there is just no work to be done. So, when the working season is short, as it was last summer, these workers do not get called back to work because of poor weather conditions and do not qualify under this unfair employment insurance system. They then experience what is known as the spring gap, which they are currently going through in March and April, when benefits have run out, but it is too early to be called back to work, which will likely be sometime in May. Since it is not May yet, these people have nothing to live on.

● (1520)

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I did sense the member could have made a lot longer speech and I will give him an opportunity to continue.

The member talked about bank profits, and we know they were \$15.9 billion last year, with the CEO of the Royal Bank making about \$10.4 million. This was at a time when 800,000 Canadians were out of work. This was at a time when the world was slipping into the worst recession since the Great Depression.

The government essentially supports the big banks. Tara Perkins has a story in the *Globe and Mail* today. In essence, the Minister of Finance is pretty much an unpaid lobbyist for the banks, by the looks of it. She says, “bankers are more concerned about a number of international rule changes, and when it comes to fighting those they have Ottawa's backing”. Therefore, the Minister of Finance is fighting international rule changes on behalf of the banks at the international level.

President Barack Obama is trying to overhaul the entire financial regulatory system. Meanwhile, Ottawa is working on just minor changes.

In addition, the G7 and the G20 nations are trying to set up a fund to take care of failing banks in the future. Once again, the Minister of Finance and the government are opposed to this. They are fighting the measure on behalf of the banks.

In addition, the G7 and G20 countries are coming out with guidelines for remuneration for bank executives. Guess what? The government and the minister are opposing it on behalf of the banks. Once again, the minister is essentially an unpaid lobbyist for the banking interests in our country.

Would the member like to comment on that and offer any other insights and information about that point?

● (1525)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, five minutes are usually allotted for questions and comments following a 10-minute speech. I figure that the member used 4 minutes and 50 seconds to put his question. I will therefore attempt to answer within 10 seconds.

Banks are the classic case. Tell me who feeds you and I will tell you who you will look after later. The Conservatives are more favourably disposed towards banks and oil companies because these generously feed their campaign fund. Anything that will further regulate the powers of banks and the earnings of bankers is a good thing.

President Obama warned people that after the health reform, they will have to seriously consider reforming banks, which are making absolutely obscene and unacceptable profits, and I am all for such reform.

Government Orders

In the budget, the Conservatives' handouts to banks and oil companies came as no surprise. They are acting like reliable poodles. It is payback time for those who influence Conservative government policies.

[*English*]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak on behalf of the constituents of Vancouver Kingsway and to offer their feedback and views on Bill C-9, the budget presented by the Conservative government.

Prior to the budget being presented in the House, I spent several months meeting with my constituents in my office and in my community in every kind of context one can imagine. I visited owners of small businesses. I went to community centres. I went door-knocking from house to house. I visited my constituents on the streets, in the markets, in the businesses and in the cultural and recreational venues of Vancouver Kingsway.

I asked them about their lives. I asked them about the federal government and about the priorities they would like to see presented in the budget. This is a particularly cogent question. As we all know, over December, January and February of 2009 and 2010, many people, including the people of Vancouver Kingsway, had to deal with a challenging economic environment. Many people, from children to seniors to working men and women, to single mothers to owners of small businesses have been struggling.

These are the priorities that my constituents overwhelmingly and repeatedly mentioned they would like to see in this budget.

They wanted to see a budget that focused on creating jobs and not just jobs as a number on a page, but good, well-paying jobs upon which someone could raise a family. They wanted to see the federal government get back into developing affordable housing in the country. They wanted to see the provision of federal funds to create a national, universal, affordable and accessible child care system.

My constituents told me they wanted to see the federal government increase its transfers to the provinces in every aspect of education, from preschool to elementary and secondary public education to universities, trade schools and community colleges of every type. They told me they wanted to see the federal government increase spending on public transit. They wanted to see the government make a clear stand, both in policy terms and in financial backup to protect our environment.

The people of Vancouver Kingsway told me they wanted to see help for seniors, whether that was providing medical, dental and transportation support. They wanted to ensure that every senior in British Columbia and across Canada could have a decent, comfortable, safe and secure place to live.

They told me they wanted to support for small businesses. They told me they wanted to see fair taxation returned to the country. On that score, the people of Vancouver Kingsway, unlike the people on the other side of the House, believe in government and believe that if we pool our resources together, we can collectively build the kind of country that will provide strong public services for every person from coast to coast to coast.

Last, the people of Vancouver Kingsway wanted to see action taken on pensions. As the baby boomers age, as the demographics in the country move us closer to retirement in ever-increasing numbers, people across Canada, including those in Vancouver Kingsway, are starting to be concerned that they will not have enough money to live decent and dignified lives when they retire at the age of 60, 65 or 70.

I submitted these submissions to the Minister of Finance and I submitted them well in advance of the budget. I am also proud to say that I submitted a number of specific requests that also emanated from direct requests from the people of Vancouver Kingsway.

They wanted us to build a mid-sized performing arts theatre in Vancouver Kingsway. They wanted to see federal help to build a Filipino cultural centre and a Vietnamese cultural centre. They wanted to see investments in affordable housing at the Little Mountain site and at the RCMP headquarters site, which will soon be vacated. They wanted to see senior stand-alone housing, public housing projects and affordable renting housing developments backstopped by the federal government.

The people of Vancouver Kingsway wanted to see the federal government make a clear stand for the children and youth of our communities and the recreational needs of our citizens by helping contribute funds to the Mount Pleasant outdoor pool, to help fund the programs and capital requirements of Cedar Cottage, Little Mountain and Collingwood Neighbourhood House

● (1530)

They wanted the federal government to help make sure that our community centres, such as Renfrew Park, Douglas Park, Trout Lake and Riley Park, have adequate space and enough funding for their programs.

They wanted to see increased services for new Canadians, the funding of more language training programs and more settlement and counselling services which are critically important to ensure that new Canadians can get settled and prosper in their new country of choice.

The people of Vancouver Kingsway specifically wanted to see more investment in community crime prevention programs and increased community policing in the riding. They wanted very practical environmental solutions right in the riding, things like bicycle paths and greenways in Vancouver Kingsway. They wanted to see increased tax credits and government grants to encourage the green retrofitting of residential and commercial buildings. They wanted to see the federal government lead the way in encouraging urban food production by investing in community gardens and other community food safety and security programs.

Most importantly, the people of Vancouver Kingsway wanted to see investments in our children. They wanted to see federal contributions to help us seismically upgrade our elementary and secondary schools. As we all know, Vancouver is in a seismically active area, and schools are the first places that people will go to in the case of an earthquake. We have seen earthquakes devastate so many countries in the world. I can say that the schools in Vancouver Kingsway and Vancouver are seismically unsafe.

They wanted to see capital and operating funds for elementary and secondary schools in Vancouver Kingsway, and operating funds for new and existing child care providers, because nothing is more important to the people of this country than their children.

Last, as I said, they wanted to invest in public transit to increase service levels on overcrowded bus routes, expand rapid transit in Vancouver and keep transit fares affordable.

This is what the people of my riding told me they wanted to see. But what did they see? Did they see the Conservative government deliver those priorities? Absolutely not.

We see very little new in this budget. It shows a government that has no clear vision for the economy. Even worse, it is repeating the failed policies of the past instead, policies that are based on the flawed assumption that increasing corporate tax cuts and deregulation are the way to fuel the economy of the future.

We see a budget that provided a missed opportunity to create jobs, help the vulnerable and contribute to building the strong kind of economy that will be needed in the years ahead. The truth is that none of the priorities expressed by the people of Vancouver Kingsway are reflected in the budget.

I heard it expressed recently that a budget represents the soul of the government. When we read the budget's priorities, we can see deeply into the very soul of the people who make up the government. We can tell what they think is important. In this respect we have a very clear picture of the type of soul on that side of the House, which is one that favours corporations, ignores the vulnerable and needy and does not fundamentally believe in building a strong, public system and delivery of services to all Canadians.

The budget should have included a national industrial strategy that focuses on investing in green jobs and the green economy. We would have liked to see a budget that provided high-paying jobs that are based on fostering innovation in green technology and green energy and, at the same time, adopting provisions that save families money on energy costs and that make sure that we have clean air, clean water and protect the environment for future generations.

We wanted to see a budget that was an opportunity to deliver on child care. Canadians need help getting back to work. Nothing is more important to them than their children, so what better way to invest and support working families than by making sure that when they drop their children off in the morning, they are in safe, secure, stimulating environments. Having a lack of child care disproportionately impacts women and low income families of all types. It is time we had a national child care program. Canadian families are waiting.

The budget was an opportunity to launch an affordable housing strategy. In Vancouver, housing is incredibly unaffordable, and the lack of affordable housing is a huge issue for many families. Too many Canadians have no adequate housing at all. Shamefully, in this country there are many people who are homeless.

• (1535)

Many people who are struggling to maintain housing, would like to purchase housing, or rent clean and affordable housing cannot do so. It is time that we had a federal government that came back into

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the housing file instead of leaving it to the provinces and cities. Without federal government participation we simply cannot provide acceptable affordable housing for everyone.

My colleague from Vancouver East has Bill C-304 before the House right now and it is time that we all got together and supported it.

I could go on, but I will conclude by saying that the budget needs to be rejected by members in the House. We need to replace it with a budget that works for everyday Canadians based on the priorities that have been identified by my constituents.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened to my hon. colleague with great interest and heard him talk about many things that he wanted to see in the budget. If he looked more closely at the budget, he would actually see those things.

I will use my riding as an example. We had an amazing announcement to support seniors in rural communities, in low income housing. We have provided upgrades for our aboriginal communities. Last week we announced a green transformation for our pulp industry which is actually going to decrease emissions by 67.2%, increase power to the grid. This is all great news. I am sure these things are going on in ridings throughout the country.

Does the hon. member not recognize the importance of also having a strong economy, strong businesses so that they can support these very important things that we all want for Canadians?

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, of course New Democrats absolutely want a strong economy for this country, but our vision of how that would be delivered is very different from that of my friend opposite.

The budget delivers no tax cuts for Canadian families. The budget increases EI premiums on working Canadians and businesses which the government simply refuses to acknowledge. It imposes more fees on the travelling public at airports. It gives tens of billions of dollars of tax cuts to corporations that do not need it. I am talking about big companies such as the oil companies and banks. On the other hand, small businesses in this country are struggling and that is why the New Democrats support the amount of small business income eligible for the reduced federal income tax rate of 11% being increased from \$400,000 to \$500,000. That is a positive move that we support.

The bottom line is that the budget does not provide the priorities that I mentioned. There is no national child care system. There is no national affordable housing strategy. It guts environmental examinations and environmental reviews. Unbelievably, it transfers environmental assessments from the Environmental Assessment Agency to the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission and the National Energy Board. Now who could stand in the House and say that represents a positive move to protect the environment when the government is transferring assessments from the chickens to the foxes?

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• (1540)

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I would like to drift away from Bill C-9 for just a moment to ask my colleague a question. He spoke of the social groups within his own province.

Recently I read a report about the despicable occupation of human trafficking. I found in my reading that his province and the social groups there have gone a long way in trying to alleviate the social cost in human trafficking of mostly women, by getting women out of the business and providing a safe haven for them. It seems in the House the debate is focused primarily on the penalties being given to those who traffic, which is a good thing and I supported the bill in relation to that. What would the member support for the federal government to get involved in providing a social safe haven for people who are victims of human trafficking in this country and around the world?

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, I very much appreciate the question from the member. I would indeed like to get into that dialogue at some appropriate time, but really the matter before the House is Bill C-9, and I want to focus on that.

The government's own budget documents show that corporate tax cuts are the worst way to stimulate the economy. Page 281 of the Conservatives' own budget, which I have read, reveals that in 2010 every dollar spent on infrastructure grows the economy by \$1.60. Every dollar spent on housing grows the economy by \$1.50. Every dollar spent on low income households grows the economy by \$1.70. However, every dollar spent on tax cuts for families only grows the economy by 90¢, and every dollar spent on corporate tax cuts grows the economy by a mere 20¢.

If we are talking about smart economics, what government would put forth a budget that is based on massive corporate tax cuts that we get 20¢ on the dollar return when we could get \$1.70 return for every dollar spent by giving that money to low income households?

That is what I mean by the New Democrats proposing measures that are smart economics for the 21st century that will build an economy that works, that is green and that is fair. That can be done, but this budget does not do it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to be speaking about Bill C-9, which would implement various initiatives presented in the Conservative government's budget of March 4. Unfortunately, it is a budget that represents the government's own interests and the interests of its friends, the banks—which we have often discussed in the House—and, of course, the oil companies, all to the detriment of those who are often the poorest in our society. They have simply forgotten about supporting families and those who are so often in need after a period of recession and economic crisis such as the one we recently experienced.

This budget was very disappointing. Contrary to the Liberals, who also find this budget disappointing, the Bloc Québécois has stood up and voted against it because it goes against the needs of Quebeckers as well as Canadians with their numerous needs.

We will vote against this budget. The Conservative government continues to spare the rich, including the banks and major

corporations. They want to make the middle class and working class pay off the operating deficit. They do not want to take profits from big banks or big oil. And then they justify it by saying that more jobs will be created for the unemployed if we give preferential treatment to the banks and big oil.

We have seen that the big banks do not necessarily create jobs. They move their capital to tax havens. We have seen it and we have the numbers to prove it. This budget does nothing about the problem of tax havens. It even allows some businesses that are not registered in Canada to avoid paying taxes in Canada when they do business. The government is protecting these people.

In term of tax loopholes, the government is still talking out of both sides of its mouth. On one hand, in its speeches and to the public, it is saying that it will target tax havens. On the other hand, it creates loopholes in the Income Tax Act allowing businesses not registered in Canada to avoid paying their fair share of taxes

This is doublespeak. There are two messages here. Rather than protecting the rich, the government should implement the measures proposed by the Bloc Québécois. In doing so, it would free up additional funds to deal effectively with deficits, while distributing wealth more equitably for all Quebeckers and Canadians.

Why not ask an extra 2% from those who earn over \$150,000, and an extra 3% from those who earn more than \$250,000? The Bloc Québécois proposes that the budget include a surtax in this regard. This would allow the federal treasury to collect \$4.8 billion annually. That is a lot of money, and this measure would not affect the poor in our society. Those who earn \$150,000 have the means to pay and to support those who make less. They can support the unemployed and low-income seniors by improving the guaranteed income supplement. This is money that could be used to support the manufacturing and forestry sectors. We could do a lot with \$4.8 billion, but the government prefers not to do it.

• (1545)

The government refuses to pick on the rich, those who have high incomes, and it also refuses to pick on the banks' outrageous profits. Instead, it goes after the poor in our society. The government makes them pay more taxes, while protecting those who hold the economic levers, under the pretext that this will generate wealth and create jobs.

Of course, this is not an approach that the Bloc Québécois supports. The Conservative government prefers to give generous deductions to oil companies and banks, while neglecting to support those who are in need.

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In fact, this government wilfully refused to improve the employment insurance program. Fifty per cent of those who lose their job do not qualify for EI benefits. This is shameful. We are talking about people who contribute to the program. We know how much profits large corporations and banks make. Employees and employers pay into the EI system, but the government has taken close to \$60 billion of these funds, over the past 10 or 15 years. It has taken this money from those who lose their job, and it has reduced access to EI for people who are in need. The government has taken that money and used it for various expenditures. Surely, that money must have helped reduce taxes for banks and make oil companies a little richer, because this is what the Conservative government has been doing for the past few years.

The Bloc Québécois has made suggestions. Some of my Bloc colleagues have presented proposals to improve the EI program. We introduced three bills. The waiting period is an issue on which I have worked very hard in my riding. I tabled a petition in the House signed by over 4,000 citizens, demanding that this unfair measure be abolished.

Not only does the government refuse to improve the employment insurance system, but it will not hesitate to dip into the EI fund, just like the Liberals before them. The waiting period must be eliminated. When someone loses their job, why should they lose another two weeks of income? Not only did they lose their job and see their income drop, but they are also penalized for two weeks. Will their landlord give them two weeks of free rent because they lost their job? Do they stop feeding their kids for two weeks when they lose their job? No, they still have expenses. Despite the staggering surpluses misappropriated from the employment insurance fund, the government still deprives these workers of an income for two weeks. It is shameful.

The Bloc Québécois introduced another bill, proposing another initiative. In our respective ridings, people who have been ill, people who have cancer for instance, come to our offices. They are entitled to only 15 weeks of employment insurance when they have a serious illness.

Once again, the Conservatives decided to put the burden of the deficit on the middle class and refused to ask for more from those who have more.

I would like to talk about Bill C-44 from the previous session, which would have amended the Canada Post Corporation Act. As part of the budget implementation, the government wants to privatize international mail. Yet that is Canada Post's cash cow. If we cut Canada Post's revenues, the repercussions will be felt in rural communities.

• (1550)

The Conservative government wants to privatize international mail, but this will mean lower revenues and then it will certainly have a hard time making the Canada Post Corporation make ends meet. That is why rural services are being cut.

[English]

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windor, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to compliment my colleague on the work that he has done on the EI file. He spoke

earlier about the elimination of the waiting period and about reducing the amount of hours.

I wholeheartedly agree with one of the issues that he brought up and that is with respect to the 15 week benefit period for compassionate care and sick benefits. The government went ahead and extended the weeks of EI, but in this particular part of the EI fund people who desperately need compassionate care or sickness benefits cannot get any more than the 15 weeks, yet in some areas regular EI benefits go for much longer.

EI is also part of seasonal work in general, and I would like for the member to comment on how Bill C-9 lacks a vision or lacks any assessment of both the fishing and the forestry industry. I would like for him to comment specifically on what he would have liked to have seen in this budget for those two particular industries.

• (1555)

[Translation]

Mr. Guy André: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent question. He talked about fishers in his area. I know that many people in his riding rely on fisheries. In my riding, we have large numbers of seasonal forestry workers and tourism workers. Often, these workers are not eligible to EI.

The employment insurance system needs to be improved, so that these workers can be eligible. For example, the minimum eligibility requirement should be set at 360 hours of work, and the rate of benefits should be raised to 60% of earnings. The waiting period should also be eliminated. This is the kind of measures that support workers.

For the past several years, the Bloc Québécois has been calling for an older workers assistance program. Regardless of who is in power, this House turned a deaf ear. These are measures to help our seasonal workers.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's comments on the budget. The budget does not provide for extending the benefit period for the unemployed. What is more, there is no additional funding for creating jobs. Nor is there anything to make access to employment insurance easier for women.

I know that my colleague has worked hard on this file. I too have introduced a bill on employment insurance. I would like him to say a few words about the difficulties our voters face when it comes to getting employment insurance and on what we had hoped to see in the budget.

Mr. Guy André: Madam Speaker, my NDP colleague has raised an important issue. I remember that the issue of women was addressed here, in 2006, when the Conservatives came to power. They simply said that there was now equality between men and women. They therefore abolished Status of Women programs and a number of other programs to improve living conditions for women.

When there are cuts to employment insurance programs, they affect women in particular because men and women are still not equal socially and economically. In Quebec, there are a number of statistics to back this up. When there is nothing in a budget for social housing, that also affects women.

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[English]

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to the budget. Part of that issue is about what it means when we talk about a Speech from the Throne. We talk about a budget and we talk about this whole sense of what it means to place action toward that. The budget is the piece of legislation that places action toward that.

What we have seen here, indeed, is a lack of that because it talks about jobs and prosperity, but what it does not do inside the budget is actually place action. It does not put the money into the programs that indeed we need across this country to ensure that we are actually going to see jobs and prosperity.

One of the things we have heard constantly from a great many of the economists who have talked about where this economy is going is about a jobless recovery. I know members opposite in the government will talk about increases in the GDP and all those lovely numbers that have constantly been set forth, but that does not translate into jobs for folks on main street.

What we are seeing across this land is stubbornly high unemployment. In fact, we are seeing people who are not covered by employment insurance anymore. As we saw in 2009, a great many people did not qualify for EI. What we now see is a whole group of people falling off EI, and we also see a huge number of people who are underemployed if not unemployed, but no longer registered because they no longer collect EI, so therefore they are not counted.

Indeed, with a national rate that might be 8%, when we add on those who are underemployed, who want to be employed full-time, when we look at folks who ultimately, at the end of the day, are not gainfully employed at this moment in time, who want to be but are not counted in the rate, that 8% might indeed be more like 12.6%, even closer to 13% or 14%.

When we talk about jobs and prosperity, especially for young people, what we see with the unemployment rate across this country for young people under the age of 25 is that it is exceeding 20%. This is not a transition of young people going from school to the work force. It is that young people just cannot find work.

In an area like mine, where we have the fourth oldest population base in this country, we see young people leaving because they do not find work in the communities that they want to stay in, where they have been raised by their families, where they have attachments to families, and where they actually want to stay and continue to grow that community.

We lose from both ends. We lose the young people. We lose those skills going forward to somewhere else, and then when they find out that it is not as good there either, quite often they find their way back, sometimes to mom and dad for that type of support because it is that bad.

I have heard colleagues talk in the House in the last couple of days about EI and what this budget does or does not do. My colleague from Acadie—Bathurst really set the tone today on the debate when it comes to EI and what happened. I know that fingers get pointed back and forth between the Conservatives and the Liberals about who spent the \$57 billion. Let me not point the finger and just

simply say it was spent. The issue now is that it needs to be put back. It is owed to those who contributed. It was a contribution from workers and their employers to cover workers in their greatest time of need, when they were unemployed. What needs to happen now is it should be re-established. The government owes that money and it should be put back. It was taken. It does not matter which stripe we want to suggest took it. It was taken and spent.

By the government's admission, the cupboards are bare. It is gone now. That is fine. That happens to all of us in family finances from time to time. The cupboard goes bare, but what we do is we work toward filling it again, and that is what the government should set as a course for itself.

The talk about why it disappeared is somewhere I do not necessarily want to go, but I want to talk about what could have been done if indeed it had not been spent willy-nilly. If it indeed had been spent in a constructive way, we would not need to see the number of private members' bills on EI reform that we have seen. I am not suggesting that they are not good private members' bills for reform. Indeed, they are.

• (1600)

The New Democrats, the Bloc and the Liberal Party have put forward a number of bills to enhance and change the system.

The problem is that this is a piecemeal fix. It is not a substitution for taking the overall plan and asking how we fix it. I heard my colleague from Bonaville—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor talking earlier about the EI piece when it comes to sickness benefits. If we had looked at the whole system, as a holistic approach, we could have fixed what is a reprehensible system where one is only allowed to be sick for 15 weeks. Tell that to the person who has contracted the illness. If people contract an illness that makes them sick for 30 weeks, they still only get paid for 15 weeks. Does that mean they are any less ill? Of course not. The system is skewed and needs to be fixed.

If either government had not spent the money, we could have fixed the system in its entirety, not one little bit at a time with a Band-aid here and a Band-aid there to try to stop the hemorrhaging.

I believe we have an opportunity with this budget to tell the government that the entire system needs to be fixed. The government has heard lots of good ideas. Time and time again I have seen the Prime Minister stand in his place and implore us on the other side of the aisle to give him our best ideas.

We have been giving him our best ideas, especially when it comes to EI reform. We have a myriad of private member's bills that talk about reforming the system and that, if taken in their totality, would fix the entire system, whether it be the sick benefits, the waiting time period, the hours or severance and vacation pay that were part of a bill I presented to this House but, unfortunately was defeated.

We could have fixed all of that system and had a system that works for Canadian workers in their greatest time of need, when they are unemployed. When they are unemployed they need the system to protect them, and that is why they paid for their insurance.

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I will now move on to pensions. This budget gives us the opportunity to fix pensions, especially when it comes to CCAA. We can look at the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act, which is a federal statute. I can give an example of what happened in my riding a number of years ago with workers at Atlas Steel in Welland. They received a registered letter at their home on a Friday evening telling them that Atlas Steel had gone into CCAA and that their pensions would be reduced by 50% as of Monday, not a year Monday but as of Monday, and that their benefits were expiring at midnight on Sunday. They had two days to get their house in order. They were losing their benefits and losing half of their pension. This was to a group of retired workers, not workers in the plant who knew they were going into bankruptcy and who were still working. This was to the workers who had been retired, many for a long time, who relied on that pension to survive. Their pensions disappeared.

What we need to do is protect pensions and this budget gives us that opportunity because there is some mention about what we do about unfunded liabilities and pensions, but it is not very clear. However, there are bills in this House that talk about how we should fix it. We can do that. The unfunded liabilities and pensions is a budget issue.

I have something to read to my colleagues, which I know my good friend from Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor will like to hear. This statute comes from the AbitibiBowater workers in my riding in Thorold. They have come together to talk about what has happened to them under CCAA and what is going to happen. They say, "Faced with the prospects of such a reduction in our monthly pensions, we formed an association in mid-2009 to protect contractual rights to full pensions, as AbitibiBowater was searching for ways and means to restructure its operations and finance it to get out of court protection".

They have come together as a community group of retired persons. These are not workers and plant management. These are retired workers who are saying that if they lose their pensions because of the CCAA at AbitibiBowater in Thorold it will have a huge impact on their community.

I believe my colleague from Windsor had said that before. What will happen is that these folks who are left in the community will have less money in their pockets to stay in their homes, pay their property taxes and feed themselves.

We not only had an obligation, we had the ability to fix it but we simply blinked and let it go away. I think that is a great injustice, not only to the workers at AbitibiBowater and at Atlas Steel in Welland but across our broader land where people are looking to us. They are telling us that the EI is in crisis and that their pensions are in crisis. They want to know what we are doing to ensure that during their most vulnerable time they will be protected.

•(1605)

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member is absolutely right. He has pegged my riding quite well.

The AbitibiBowater situation was, for him, as it was for me, an incredible eye-opener. I hope this House realizes that for people in the United States right now, credit protection for them is more beneficial than what we have here.

The member made a valid point about communities. It was not just the AbitibiBowater workers who as of last year were losing out on the value of their pension, which was down by 30% because of the economic downturn, but in the absence of the mill that closed down in Grand Falls—Windsor, these high salary jobs were eliminated, which means the pensions received by the former workers now comprise a major economic driver in the Exploits Valley region.

We keep forgetting that a better way of receiving remuneration once we are retired, a better pension is also a vanguard to economic development for some of these smaller communities. I do not think I am far-fetched by saying this.

What are some of the measures he is proposing to help these people who are suffering from deficient or unfunded liabilities in their pensions?

•(1610)

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Madam Speaker, the member is absolutely right. I think his riding and mine are somewhat mirror images of each other, even though my riding is on the lake and the Welland Canal. His riding is a beautiful place because I have been there on vacation. It is a wonderful riding and a wonderful place to be. However, he is right about the impacts we have seen on those workers in his riding, in my riding and in other ridings across this land.

We had an opportunity and still have an opportunity in this House with the bill from the member from Hamilton which deals with how to fix it.

We have unanimously said in this House that we need to fix the pension system when it comes to the creditors and whatnot but we are not doing that. The government does not implement what it says is a good idea. It is not implementing what needs to be done. This is about the most vulnerable at a stage in their life where they need to be protected. It should not need not be repeated but I guess I need to do that. These are the folks who built this place and this country for us and now we are saying, "You know what? Thanks for that, but that's a memory. See you later. Get on with it. We'll put you in a long-term care institution and then we'll be done with you".

That is not what it should be. We owe them respect and dignity later in their life. We have an obligation to them to fix the system that they helped create which was supposed to allow them to go into retirement and enjoy their retirement years with some sense of respect and dignity that would get them into their later life. This is not a right that they think they should have. It is an obligation we have to them. They are simply asking us to please fix it. We owe them that fix and I think we ought to be doing that, not today but yesterday.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I listened to what my colleague was saying. I agree with most of his comments but I would like his thoughts on something else.

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The government is trying to ram the partial deregulation of Canada Post down our throats through this mini omnibus budget. The fact that this measure is now included in this budget implementation bill illustrates the somewhat hypocritical and devious nature of this Conservative government and its desire to completely deregulate the crown corporation. The Conservative government is obviously trying to fool the public by slipping this deregulation plan in with everything else in this 800-page budget implementation bill. It is an indirect way of making cuts by using this bill on the heels of Bill C-44 that was introduced in the House.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about this because, as I have said so many times, cuts to Canada Post result in cuts to revenues and often the impact is felt in rural areas. Often there is reduced postal service for people living in rural areas. I would like to hear—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Welland has about 40 seconds to respond.

[English]

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Madam Speaker, a large component of my riding is rural and it relies on Canada Post.

The member is absolutely right. It is duplicitous in nature to put into the budget bill all of the additional pieces that we should be debating in the House. Whether we have decided to do or not do certain things when it comes to Canada Post and the other measures, this basically amounts to an omnibus bill, and, as my colleague who sits beside me said, of 880 pages. He is absolutely correct.

The House and Canadians deserve to have parliamentarians debate the issues of their needs across this land, not just the budget. The budget is what it is. We should debate it, move on and then we should be looking at all those aspects one at a time, bill by bill, ensuring we have the opportunity to debate it, make decisions about it and not have it all stuffed into one big book.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-9, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 4, 2010. I brought in my own copy of Bill C-9. As you just heard, my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé, who is doing excellent work, spoke about Canada Post. I am the Bloc Québécois critic on Canada Post. One of the major challenges in the past two years has been the remailer issue. Two bills were introduced by the Conservatives on this issue. The elections in 2006 and 2008 ensured that these bills never passed. When Parliament was prorogued most recently, another bill introduced by the Conservatives died on the order paper. I want to show how sneaky the government can get with a bill. As we have already heard, this bill has 880 pages, and the section that applies to Canada Post is summarized in a quarter of a paragraph. It is in part 15, which takes up seven lines out of 880 pages. It states:

Section 15 of the Canada Post Corporation Act is amended by adding the following after subsection (2):

(3) The exclusive privilege referred to in subsection 14(1) does not apply to letters intended for delivery to an addressee outside Canada.

It is important to note how the Conservatives slipped this into the bill. The Bloc Québécois is opposed to the budget and will therefore

oppose Bill C-9, the budget implementation bill. But we will be doubly opposed to this bill because the Conservatives, who campaigned on a platform of transparency, are using the tried and true tricks Conservatives and Liberals have used for 140 years in this country, and by that I mean burying major reforms in a bill. This represents a significant change to Canada Post.

Why did the government previously introduce two bills that went nowhere? Because putting an end to Canada Post's exclusive privilege gives rise to a great deal of debate. Canada Post is the only service the Government of Canada provides for the public. The Government of Canada does not look after health, education or transportation, even though it tries to tell us that it invests a lot of money in these areas. These services are delivered by the municipality or the province, at least in Quebec.

The only hospital that belongs to the Government of Canada is the veterans hospital in Saint-Anne-de-Bellevue. Yet the Government of Quebec will likely take over running that hospital in the near future under a memorandum of understanding. So mail delivery is the only real service the Government of Canada provides for people.

For purely partisan reasons and obviously under pressure from lobbyists, the government is siding with a whole industry that has sprung up alongside Canada Post: the remailing industry. I am talking about companies that serve large businesses by collecting mail going outside Canada, even though collecting letter mail is an exclusive privilege of Canada Post. Canada Post has tolerated this, because there are businesses that turn all their international mail over to private companies because postage rates differ from country to country. In my riding, there are aeronautics and aerospace firms that have clients all over the world.

The problem is that the companies that offered this service, which was tolerated by Canada Post, decided that, as long as they were collecting mail going abroad, they would collect all the mail, handle all the mail, offer services, do home delivery and everything.

• (1615)

On account of Canada Post's exclusive privilege, the burden of proof was on the private companies offering this service. They lost in the courts, and Canada Post obtained an injunction to have certain operations of its competitors who had procured this service stopped, because Canada Post had the exclusive privilege to collect lettermail.

Government Orders

Obviously, the remailer lobbyists have succeeded in convincing the Conservatives—and I would even say certain Liberals—that the service they are offering has to be maintained, even if they collect some mail for inside Canada. The remailers will try to revise their methods and focus on mail collected for outside Canada. The snag is that, in amending the law, it will now be up to Canada Post to prove that these companies are in non-compliance. How will it be possible to prove that, when a private company decides to collect a business's mail, it is not at the same time collecting mail destined for inside Canada? So the burden of proof is being reversed, and Canada Post has tallied this at \$80 million in lost revenue. The president of Canada Post, Ms. Moya Greene, told us that the corporation was going to lose \$80 million because of this.

This week Canada Post sent me some of its executives, who explained that Canada Post will be experiencing some difficulties in the years ahead and will have to cut back its services, modernize its operations and try to recover what it can. Tens of thousands of jobs will be lost at Canada Post over the next five to eight years because the corporation will have to recover some money. But a portion of the money to be recovered will include the \$80 million that Canada Post is going to lose because the government has just allowed private companies to have a share of this market.

The fact that jobs will have to be cut means that services will be lost. What poses a problem is service in the regions. Every citizen, every taxpayer, has the right to have their mail delivered. Whether they live in Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, Notre-Dame-de-la-Paix or Lac-aux-Sables, whatever the municipality, everyone has the right to have their mail delivered. The reality is that this is being worked on now.

Canada Post tried to argue that there were safety concerns, that they had to be careful and that routes were dangerous and should be cut. Members of the Bloc Québécois took up the fight and put an end to this idea. The routes were maintained. Some safety studies were done, but ultimately the president just wanted to reduce and eliminate rural mail delivery. That is what she wanted. She wanted to concentrate the mail in boxes very close to village post offices.

I was told today that safety had cost Canada Post more than expected. That is for sure because our members were vigilant and managed to let everyone know that Canada Post was trying not to have to deliver the mail any more. The government evidently issued directives to Canada Post indicating that it should maintain this service. If we look closely, though, at the delivery protocol drawn up by the minister responsible for Canada Post, a lot of escape hatches have been included: if a postal worker becomes sick and Canada Post cannot replace him, it can close his post office, or if the post office is located on the premises of a private company and the contract cannot be renewed, the post office can be transferred. The purpose is to succeed some day in centralizing postal services in major cities.

Once again, in a bill that is 880 pages long, we see them introducing a part 15, just seven lines in length, that puts an end to Canada Post's exclusive privileges. The Conservative members do not even realize the harm they are going to do to mail delivery, but they are not Conservatives for nothing. It is hard to hold it against them. As soon as they get up in the morning, the boss issues the orders. They cannot think for themselves. In actual fact, the

government is trying once again to avoid discussion in committee. It did not table a separate bill. As a result, there will not be any discussions in committee about Canada Post, and all the towns and the citizens of Quebec will suffer the consequences.

The Bloc Québécois will vote against this bill.

• (1620)

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I wish to commend my colleague on an excellent speech. It would appear that the democratic debates in this House on bills to privatize international mail have had the Conservatives grow impatient.

Now, they have put before us a big, 800-page budgetary document, which is a hypocritical way of cutting services at Canada Post. Of course, there will be cuts at Canada Post, and these will have an impact on rural areas, like when the decision was made to redistribute postal boxes.

Does this mean that the Conservatives do not like democratic debate in the House? They sneak through their legislative proposal, as they have done numerous times in the past. I would like to hear my colleague on that.

• (1625)

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Madam Speaker, my colleague is right. This is an underhanded way of proceeding. What is worse, the Conservatives are taking advantage of the Liberals' weakness. They know that the Liberals will do everything they can to ensure that this bill is passed. The Liberal members will be hiding behind the doors. Some of them will be absent or say that they are sick, others will remain seated. As a result, mail delivery services will be cut.

The Conservatives have seen the Liberals' weakness. They knew full well that if they had introduced a separate bill in committee, the Bloc Québécois would have stood its ground and done everything it could to ensure that the bill did not pass. We have already managed to keep this bill from being passed.

They are taking advantage of the Liberals' weakness. I cannot wait to see what they will do. How are they going to justify cuts to postal services? Will they hide or stay seated? We will see what the Liberals end up doing, but they will be going against their constituents' interests if they choose either of these courses of action.

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member has analysed this quite well. However, we are missing another big element. Where are the Conservative speakers? We have debated this 880 page implementation bill for three days now. As the member said, there are issues in the bill all cobbled together, such as the post office remailer, which have nothing to do with the budget, and nobody shows up to speak for the government. Therefore, we have a debate going on among the opposition parties. It is all about that. We cannot ask the government any questions because there is nobody to ask any questions of.

Government Orders

Several Bloc members have talked about the issue of tax havens. The government is obviously siding with the banks. The banks are making \$15 billion at a time of recession when 880,000 people are unemployed. Bank presidents are making \$10 million a year. When it became apparent that people were using tax havens, the \$3 billion that have been sitting in tax havens, the government's answer was to offer a tax amnesty. When the information became public, because a bank employee sold records to the German government a couple of years ago, Canadians were running into Revenue Canada offices to take advantage of the amnesty to pay the taxes.

In other words, the message of the government is to take advantage of tax havens and all people have to do is pay—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. I must give the hon. member time to respond.

The hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Madam Speaker, my colleague is right about the Conservatives' reaction. When a government is sneaky enough to put an end to an exclusive privilege of Canada Post in an 880-page bill, it certainly does not want people to talk about it in committee, much less in the House of Commons.

The Conservatives will not want anyone to talk about this in the Standing Committee on Finance, which will be analyzing this budget. It will be interesting to watch what they do. This bill will mean less door-to-door mail delivery for people across Canada. The Conservatives certainly do not want us to talk about this in the House, and they do not want us to ask them any questions about it.

In Quebec, it is the people who will be penalized. In all the other provinces, once again, the people will be penalized by the federal government's budget measures. I am not even sure the Conservative members themselves read the bill.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is a privilege to rise to speak to the budget. I will shorten my speech as I need to be at another location. However, I want to touch on a couple of important points that are critical for the economy, also for social policy to evolve and to tackle some of the challenges of today.

One interesting thing about the budget is the series of new taxes in it, yet the conservatives claim that they are not. There is also a whole series of new types of policies that will undermine the strength of our country.

It was mentioned earlier about the new taxes on security to the airline industry. It is important, especially coming from my area in Windsor. The proposed new type of screening facilities came about because of a situation that eventually ended in Detroit. Someone overseas boarded a plane, with a one-way ticket, in the middle of winter with no winter gear. He was not seen as a threat even though the government of the United States knew about it. The father of the person phoned the U.S. government and told it that his son was not feeling right or had a problem. Despite all that, he went through the system, came across Canada and tried a terrorist activity in Detroit, Michigan. Thank God nothing happened and the people there were able to fix the problem. However, the screening equipment ordered for Canadian airports would not even stop that type of situation from

occurring. There is no connection to this new expense. There was no debate or discussion about it. Now this new tax is being thrust upon the industry at a time where it is struggling.

This is the type of behaviour we see from the government, "It's my way or the highway". We have seen this behaviour with one of the most critical issues to take place in Ontario and British Columbia, and that is the implementation of the HST. It is a creature of the finance minister. He has been discussing this issue for many years. It has been suggested that this came from rogue Liberals in other provinces, although they have been accomplices to it. However, it does not have to take place because federal legislation is required. Interestingly enough a federal bribe is required in billions of dollars to those provinces.

In this whole equation, Canadians will be taxed more. This shifting of the tax arrangement will punish the middle-class quite significantly. On top of that, the Conservative Party is borrowing those billions of dollars from taxpayers who will have to pay interest on it over the next number of years. I had the parliamentary research do an analysis of the borrowing costs over 10 years and estimations of what the tradition has been in those 10 years of paying it back. Until we go back into a surplus, we will pay for this borrowed money with a new tax on people. It is absolute insanity. The estimated cost from the Library of Parliament, depending on the circumstances, is maybe \$7 billion to \$9 billion, depending upon whether is paid back over 10 years and we get back into a surplus. That is what the government is doing. It is borrowing money and paying a premium on it, so Canadians are going to be taxed further. It is absolute, utter nonsense.

The Conservatives rammed this through Parliament, with the help of the Liberals. They wanted to ensure their cousins in those provinces would be able to get this cash payout, especially because of the circumstance they were in as well as the ideologies meet up quite well. This was rammed through with very little debate, discussion and no study.

The industry committee was one of the few that had any type of involvement whatsoever with this issue on a parliamentary level because we needed to have the tourism sector come in. The government did not even study the impacts of the HST implementation. We have a major tax policy change, no study on it and there are no qualifications or reparations if there are problems.

We heard significant testimony from the tourism industry. American visitation is down. The Canadian dollar is up. Ever since 9/11 and the increased security, there has been less travel for some sectors of the tourism industry. It is concerned with this tax. Since there was no study on the effects of it, we have a whole slew of new costs that will go into the system.

Government Orders

•(1630)

As well, it came when the government in previous budgets got rid of very beneficial programs like getting the GST back after visiting Canada. One could actually claim to get it back. It was an attractive way to be able to promote Canada. The government got rid of that and it expanded it.

When we look at the budget and its priorities, we see that it redistributes the wealth again. I want to touch briefly on the corporate tax cut, which is really important. It is significant because we are also getting rid of the fiscal capacity of the country.

I had a study commissioned by the research division of Parliament to look at the cost of corporate tax cuts and what they have meant to this country. It studied it from 2000 to 2007, the first wave. What it cost the coffers of the country is approximately \$86 billion.

To get to the actual next level of corporate tax cut, reductions to 15% over the next year, the research division estimated the total cost to Canadians is \$171 billion.

What is important to talk about is that we are borrowing money to do this. We are borrowing money from Canadians to provide a corporate tax cut.

When we talk to business people about it, they understand this and they get that this is wrong. The oil and gas companies, the insurance companies and the banks, all those companies right now that are gouging Canadians in the extreme are going to get a benefit, and our coffers are bare.

I want to conclude by saying that it is important that Canadians are supported during this process. That is why we had an NDP amendment on pensions, employment insurance and a series of things to redirect the money and put it back in the pockets of people.

•(1635)

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I share my hon. friend's concerns about airports and access to travel for businesses and travellers in parts of Canada that are, let us say, outside the major metropolitan areas. With all due deference, the member probably thinks very highly of Windsor, but it is not Toronto, and Moncton is not Montreal, and Kelowna and Abbotsford are not Vancouver.

Therefore the budget hurts those mid- to smaller-size airports.

I want him to elaborate. In addition to the user fee, essentially, that is being tacked on to each individual traveller, I would like the member to comment on the deleterious effect, from page 292 of the bill, with respect to the cuts to CATSA in general and also the Canada Border Services Agency for international airports that have to have personnel to accept passengers returning home to Canada from charter flights. Many small and medium-size airports, from Mont Tremblant to Abbotsford to Charlottetown to Windsor, rely on these flights.

Many of these airports rely on passenger travel for survival. The Greater Moncton International Airport has more than 500,000 passengers a year, and these measures will hurt that airport because perhaps there will be one scanner for 500 passengers a day in a 20-minute or half-hour period.

That is going to really deter people from using airports like Moncton and Windsor. Perhaps the member could comment on those cuts.

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Speaker, it is a problem and the cut is significant.

I was actually on my municipal council when it assumed the airport, when it was devolved down to the city of Windsor after the town of Tecumseh turned away from the project.

The federal government walked away from many of these small airports that are very important for the region, economically as well as socially.

One of the things it had to do was augment service through cargo and passenger flights, as noted by the member. One of the services was tourism. We have Sunwing, for example, which will go into these smaller markets and be able to offer direct-destination flights, which is important because it brings in revenue for the airport and it also creates jobs and is so often like running a small or medium-size airport. It is almost like a Frankenstein type of operation, because we need to add parts and elements to make sure it is going to be sustainable.

Therefore it is very important that these airports are profitable. The cuts are going to put on more of a burden. The costs of customs, officials and the support system that are necessary for people coming home from these international flights are now going to be increased and passed on to the passenger. It is going to be very difficult for some of these operations to stay in place.

If the operations do not stay in place, then these airports have lost a source of revenue that is critical in the overall footprint of their operations and for the country to be successful, because we just cannot survive with one or two big airports.

•(1640)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Questions and comments. The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona. A very brief comment or question.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is that the government is sending the wrong signals to the unemployed and the working people of this country when it takes a corporate tax rate and lowers it to 12%. When it has record bank profits of \$15 billion and allows CEOs to make \$10 million a year, that is not reality for average people.

An article in today's *Globe and Mail* talks about the Minister of Finance acting as an unpaid lobbyist for the banks. He is trying to get a good deal for the banks, negotiating with the G7 and the G20, who are trying to regulate the banks, bring in a new regulation scheme and put some restrictions on what these bank presidents can earn. Does the member agree with what the G7 and the G20 are trying to do?

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Speaker, this relationship is ironic. The member summed up the situation quite well. I will not expand on that, but I do want to note that I was here during the years when John Manley tried to open up the Bank Act. The argument was that we needed to Americanize our banks, that they were too small to survive and their operations were antiquated and that we should open up the Bank Act and make it look like the American one.

Government Orders

The Liberals at the time were looking at it and they had their pals in the Conservative and the Alliance who were basically pushing for this as well. I will give the Bloc Québécois credit. It was a small band of New Democrats that stopped that. Ironically, I had banking officials in my office. They came in to lobby one day and I reminded them of those days. Check *Hansard* and read the history. They are now talking about how good they are, but it was only because they were stopped from themselves.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Etobicoke North, Agriculture; the hon. member for Don Valley East, Government Spending; the hon. member for Labrador, Aboriginal Affairs.

Mr. Nicolas Dufour (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-9, the budget implementation bill.

This budget was very disappointing. That is one of the main reasons all opposition parties will vote against it.

Unfortunately, as usual, the Liberals will manipulate the vote to ensure that the government does not fall and that an election is not called. The government will continue going from bad to worse, in light of everything going on right now. With their outdated thinking, the Conservatives will continue governing in their own special way.

I could talk about what the bill, over 800 pages long, does contain, but instead I will talk about what is missing. The budget does not contain compensation for Quebec for post-secondary education. In 1994 and 1995, the Liberal government, under the Right Hon. Jean Chrétien, cut post-secondary education transfers to balance the federal budget.

Once again, we saw the Liberal government's open-minded approach and the wonderful open federalism that all federalist parties have been practising in the House since the beginning of the Constitution. There is a serious lack of respect for provincial jurisdictions and the government refuses to give money back to the provinces so they can overcome the challenges they face. As a result, the provinces have been sinking deeper and deeper into debt for the past 20 years. All this so that the government can have it easy and enjoy surpluses and spend them on areas of provincial jurisdiction, particularly in Quebec. We have seen this on many issues, such as the sponsorship scandal, when we clearly saw the federal government manipulating things to promote and spout propaganda about its federalism.

Post-secondary education transfers were cut in 1994 and 1995, which created a fiscal imbalance of over \$800 million for the Quebec nation. Because of that deficit, Quebec had to make some crucial, unpopular choices in order to be able to balance its education budget.

I find it extremely sad that the Conservative government has recognized the nation of Quebec, but has not allowed it to thrive. If you are going to recognize a nation you must give it the means to thrive mainly by promoting education and through massive investment. Young people need to be encouraged to get an education, do research and become better citizens in order for the nation to thrive. On one hand, the government recognizes the nation

of Quebec, but on the other hand it is not giving that nation the means to thrive, educate itself and grow.

The government has created a deficit of more than \$800 million since 1994-95. I find it extremely sad that the Conservative government has not tried to correct the problem that the Liberals created at the time. There is nothing in the budget to help the nation of Quebec in terms of education. There is nothing about giving us what we are owed. We did not steal that money. We gave it to the federal government in taxes.

• (1645)

What did the federal government do? It invested the money in areas under exclusive provincial jurisdiction and we were not given the right to opt out with full compensation. The federal government invests in areas of its own interest and not in areas that are viable for the nation of Quebec.

The nation of Quebec has therefore had to make extremely difficult choices in its education budget. Again, the problem has been offloaded to someone else. Again, the nation of Quebec ends up empty handed and having to resolve major problems. There is absolutely no help coming from the federal government.

That is one of the reasons my colleague from Hochelaga introduced a bill in the House to limit the federal government's power to spend in areas under exclusive provincial jurisdiction. When it comes time to vote, we will see where the Liberals and Conservatives stand.

How can the Conservative members from Quebec tell the people of Quebec that they practice an open federalism and recognize the Quebec nation, and that they are helping the Quebec government with its dreams and ambitions, when the government is taking away everything of interest to Quebec and cannot even give back what it owes to Quebec?

I find that very sad. Once again, it proves that federalism is not a viable option for the Quebec nation. This is compelling evidence that Quebec sovereignty is and will always be the best alternative to federalism. What is even more unfortunate is that the Liberals will probably do the same thing as our Conservative colleagues and vote against the bill on spending power in areas of exclusive provincial jurisdiction introduced by my colleague for Hochelaga.

The Liberals have shown on a number of occasions that they do not intend to stop federal spending. On the contrary, the government will put provinces into debt and cut transfer payments in order to present a positive balance sheet to the world. That is very unfortunate because our fellow citizens pay taxes and will be impoverished.

The Conservatives will probably vote against the bill by the member for Hochelaga even though it fulfils an election promise they made in 2006. Members will recall the campaign speech given by the Prime Minister when he came to Quebec to explain that not only would he recognize the Quebec nation, but that his open federalism was completely different than the dominating federalism of the Liberals.

That is more proof of the Conservative Party's deceit. It promises one thing and then, when the time comes to take action and to vote in the House, it does the exact opposite of what it promised.

I will be very interested in seeing how the Conservative members from Quebec can defend the Conservative Party and its open federalism when their Prime Minister, in this budget, has broken his own promises once again.

• (1650)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's comments on this bill. My question is regarding pensions and seniors. We have heard a lot of talk about seniors. We have heard that they do not have enough money for housing, food and medication.

The budget does not address the crisis facing the pension system. There is no agency to pick up orphaned pension plans. There is no extension for CPP or QPP benefits, and no increases to GIS payments. The government refuses to invest about \$700 million every year to lift our seniors out of poverty. There is no protection in place for pensions when the employer goes bankrupt.

Can my colleague explain how the public will be affected by the government's inaction, when that government said that it would address money issues for retirees? What should the government do in its budget to benefit the public?

Mr. Nicolas Dufour: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

My predecessor and friend, Raymond Gravel, former member for Repentigny, introduced a bill in this House with regard to the guaranteed income supplement. Unfortunately, this bill was defeated, mainly because the Conservatives voted against it. This bill asked for very little when you think about how much seniors, as taxpayers, have done for the Quebec nation as well as Canada. We asked for an additional \$110 a month. Considering how much the federal government spends in certain areas, especially the astronomical amounts allotted for military spending, maybe we should have redirected some of this money to those who are most worthy of it, to those who built this country. That would have been much fairer.

[English]

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windor, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to stick with the same topic here, which would be the pensions. I want the member to flesh out some of the ideas that he has about the increase in the GIS as one aspect of it.

What we forget is that back in the old days when the QPP and CPP were created in the mid-60s, as a wonderful piece of social legislation, Quebec played a huge role in the genesis of that particular program. It has progressed socially through some great policies, no matter what political stripe the government of the day was in the province of Quebec.

When the member talks about jurisdiction, what is he talking about? Is he talking about the federal government in Ottawa handing out money to be administered by the QPP within the province of Quebec alone, with complete jurisdiction over this?

Government Orders

Second, does the member believe that people should be allowed to voluntarily up their payments to CPP as a way of securing their pensions?

• (1655)

[Translation]

Mr. Nicolas Dufour: Madam Speaker, I greatly appreciate the hon. member's question.

The issue of pensions is an international problem. Unfortunately, it is not exclusive to Canada. It has also arisen because of the predominant mentality of the time. First, life expectancy was much lower and pensions were funded accordingly. No one really thought that people would live to be so old and retire so young. The issue of age would create a serious change, but the problem lies in the fact that there is a shortage of money. This has been an astronomical actuarial problem. The way in which pension funds are managed will seriously need to be rethought.

I think it is a shame that instead of taking action, the Minister of Finance simply offloaded the problem onto the provinces and dithered. He was no longer sure what to do and finally he decided to launch consultations even though he has the means to take real action to help our seniors.

[English]

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to stand here to speak as the member for Churchill, as a member of the New Democratic Party in this House, to Bill C-9, the budget implementation bill.

While it is an honour to speak to it, this is fundamentally a document of ideas that is profoundly disappointing. Why is it disappointing? Because this is a budget, an implementation bill, and an agenda, that leaves Canadians behind.

As the MP for Churchill, this budget leaves my region behind. It leaves northerners who live in my region of Manitoba and all across the country behind, when it comes to the needs that they have expressed so clearly are important to them.

Take, for example, one of the greatest needs that we have, housing. There is nothing there. In the area of health, an area in which we face great challenges, whether it is the lack of medical professionals or the lack of services, while the government maintains the continued amount of transfers as there was last year, there is no investment in our health care system in a way that meets the demands people have.

More broadly, in terms of infrastructure for our regions, many of our communities are far away from each other and are looking to diversify their economies, looking to build linkages. This budget has nothing new. While some things were promised last year, there is no vision for rebuilding, for reinvesting, and for ultimately moving forward at a time of difficult economic recession.

Government Orders

Also, in terms of the industries that are integral to our region, this budget holds nothing. When it comes to forestry, not only is there no plan to support forestry communities, but we actually have measures in the budget implementation bill that further continue the suffering that communities such as The Pas, Manitoba or Opaskwayak Cree Nation experience in my region. Through this budget implementation bill we see the raising of export tariffs on softwood lumber products from my province by 10%, in addition to the pain felt as a result of the government selling off our lumber and refusing to stand for forestry communities.

More broadly, the budget implementation bill leaves Canadians behind across the board, in light of the experiences they have had over the last few years, more specifically in the last year. For Canadians who have lost their jobs, some of them in my region and regions all across the country, the budget does not hold the support they need. When we look at employment insurance that workers have paid in, week after week, year after year, and hold on to that for times of difficulty, we have a government that, instead of supporting the workers at the hardest time they are experiencing, instead of helping, is actually looking at emptying the employment insurance account and also increasing premiums over time.

When it comes to pensions, there are some references to pension measures, but we in the NDP have been proud to forward so many initiatives called on by the labour movement, called on by working people all across this country, and called on by seniors. Yet, this budget holds none of that. It does not propose to improve the retirement security that so many Canadians are looking for.

The budget also holds nothing for young people. While there are some measures in terms of summer jobs and certainly some charitable enterprises, the budget leaves young Canadians behind. What about job initiatives year round?

Young people who have been the first to lose their jobs and are struggling to find new ones during one of the most difficult economic times have been coming to me and sharing the challenge of trying to find proper employment, not just during the summer but year round. Many of them get stuck in minimum wage jobs, oftentimes even after they have graduated or invested years in post-secondary education. They are forced to look at jobs that do not remunerate them in a way that reflects the education they paid for and invested in. The budget has nothing when it comes to supporting young people entering the job market and finding sustainable work.

● (1700)

It also has nothing to support young people with the continued burden that a post-secondary education is proving to hold here in Canada. Tuition fees are increasing in almost every province in Canada, with the exception of a few. As a result, student debts are increasing at historic rates. I mentioned it before in this House, but we have the shameful number of \$13 billion as the amount of money that students, former students and current students, now are faced with as they go into a very uncertain job market. This budget holds nothing to alleviate that stress.

This budget is also dangerous. It leaves Canadians behind because it takes away some of the supports that link us, that link our communities, that make us stronger. I reference two areas in particular.

One is that of privatization. The budget implementation bill talks about removing Canada Post's legal monopoly on outgoing international letters. Much has been said about protecting Canadian institutions. Canada Post is one of the institutions that Canadians are very proud of and would hope that our government would support. We are seeing that the government not only is not standing up for it but it is choosing to chip away pieces of it. It is selling off parts of it. The government is weakening an institution that allows us to communicate, an institution that is part of our identity as Canadians.

This budget also puts Canadians behind. It weakens Canada through deregulation. My colleague from Edmonton—Strathcona has spoken with regard to the environmental regulations that are being done away with in this budget. As many Canadians hear more information about this, they are becoming increasingly disturbed by these measures that are found in budget, such as exempting federally funded projects from environmental assessments.

Further deregulation is proposed in the telecommunications area. We have heard from the CRTC and from others. There is great concern with respect to the government's agenda in this area.

What I and many others cannot understand is how the government proposes to move forward as a country while it sells off, deregulates and privatizes parts of our economy, parts of our identity that truly keep us together and that reflect who we are as Canadians and that reflect Canadian values.

Finally, I would like to note the way in which this budget forgets many people whom I have the honour of representing, and they would be first nations and Métis people.

This budget is a disgrace when it comes to aboriginal issues. Front and centre is the failure to commit funding to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. This area is a great passion of mine. I know first-hand what it means to the people in my region. I know what it means first-hand to the survivors, young people and people all across the board who live in northern Manitoba who depend on community-driven programming to help them heal from the trauma of residential schools.

I was in my riding last week and I heard not only from my constituents, but I also heard from people across Canada. They spoke of the hypocrisy of a government that apologized to residential school survivors, made them believe that a new page would be turned when it came to our history and yet, all it said was "sorry". The programming that residential school survivors and their communities have called for has been cut.

While the current government with this budget is leaving Canadians behind, we in the NDP have hope. We have hope that our initiatives, whether they be on pensions, EI, the environment, housing, restoring funding for aboriginal organizations, are the initiatives that ought to be followed. Canadians are calling for these initiatives to be followed. In fact the majority of members in this House are calling for these initiatives to be followed. Because this is not something for us. This is for the benefit of all Canadians, the people we are here to represent.

● (1705)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for an excellent speech.

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In the 1880s, John A. Macdonald and the Conservative Party had a dream of unifying the country by building a railway across the country. A similar type of dream exists in that a lot of people want to build an east-west power grid to move clean hydroelectric power across Canada, as opposed to just north and south, as is the case now.

The minister for democratic reform has been a leader on this issue, but he is not getting the support from the nine Conservative MPs from Manitoba nor the 14 Conservative MPs from Saskatchewan. The fact of the matter is that in the last three days, no Conservatives have been speaking to this budget. I am sure that the member for Portage—Lisgar would have liked to speak to this budget and talk about the east-west power grid. I am sure the member for Brandon—Souris would have liked to speak to this budget and talk about the east-west power grid. The member for Kildonan—St. Paul, the member for Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, the member for Winnipeg South, the member for Saint Boniface and the member for Selkirk—Interlake, I know all these members would have loved to get up and put on the record that they want their government to commit to building an east-west power grid.

I want them to start helping the minister for democratic reform because he is doing a good job. We have to work together as a federal government with the provincial governments in Manitoba and Saskatchewan to make this dream a reality.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, I completely agree with my colleague and fellow Manitoban and call on our fellow Manitoba MPs to show some leadership and truly support what is not only a positive environmental strategy but a truly sustainable economic strategy, one that would plug in our province's hydroelectric power in such a great way.

Not only are we not seeing Manitoba MPs on the Conservative benches speak out, but in general, we are not seeing Conservative MPs speak out on the huge gaps that are in this budget and the way they are selling off our country, not just for Canadians today but for their children, for our future. I would be very interested to hear with what conscience they do that.

• (1710)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague just spoke with respect to the Conservatives not getting up and talking on this issue. I can understand why they do not want to get up. They are probably ashamed of the fact that they are only giving \$3.25 a week as part of an increase in the child tax credit and they consider that to be a child care subsidy. That is a shame.

My colleague also spoke with respect to youth. I would like to ask my colleague to talk about the environment and what is in this bill, or more so, what is not in the bill, and how this will impact on the youth of this country, because they are our future.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, I believe that the environmental piece in this budget, which is fundamentally one of the hidden poison pills, is in fact one of the most disturbing.

Our party has done a great deal to provide leadership through Bill C-311 and truly to guide the government into regaining some credibility when it comes to the environment. Unfortunately, we have not seen it do so. It was embarrassing that we went to Copenhagen in the way we did. Quite frankly, the state in which the

rest of the world views Canada when it comes to the environment is embarrassing.

As a young Canadian and somebody who grew up in a school system that talked about the need for the next generation to care, become involved and be environmentally conscious, this is not the kind of Canada we would imagine. This is not the kind of Canada that most young Canadians view. By and large, it is young people who are increasingly very concerned about the environment. We have seen different displays of that concern. The Conservative government is letting down Canada's next generation.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House to speak to Bill C-9, the budget implementation bill. I want to begin my remarks by commenting on the enormity of this bill. It is 872 pages long and has 24 different parts.

When one goes through the bill, whether one goes through the summary or starts looking at the bill in its totality, one can see immediately that the Conservative government has decided to use this bill as a cover for all kinds of very negative and bad public policy initiatives. We are certainly aware of that and this is one of the reasons it is very important that debate take place on Bill C-9.

I would add to the comments made by my colleagues that it is very ironic that Conservative members are choosing not to debate this bill, because it is simply enormous when one considers what is covered in it. We did hear the budget speech and we had the budget itself, but this budget implementation bill goes far beyond what was contained in the budget. It is using itself as a cover for all kinds of draconian measures. I will mention a couple.

Environmental assessment is a very important issue in terms of ensuring that the public interest is represented in dealing with environmental issues. Why is it in a budget implementation bill that the minister will now have all kinds of discretion to dictate the scope of environmental assessments of any of the projects to be reviewed? Why would it be that federally funded infrastructure projects can now be exempted from environmental assessment?

These are very serious questions which in and of themselves should be debated separately through legislation in a debate in the House, yet they have been slipped into Bill C-9, the budget implementation act. We are very concerned about that. We are very disturbed that the government is yet again using these kinds of means to try and slip important matters through the House.

The Conservatives did it a few years ago with Bill C-50, when they brought in all kinds of very substantive changes to the Citizenship and Immigration Act. They used a budget bill to do that. We see the same in this bill with Canada Post. We know that the Conservatives have tried to move a bill through the House which in effect would privatize aspects of Canada Post and affect the jobs and services that are provided by that crown corporation and federal agency.

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We have held up that bill. We prevented it from coming forward. What is the response? Yet again, the Conservatives are trying to slip it through in the budget implementation bill. I am actually surprised that they did not try to include the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement and sneak that one through, too, because we have been holding that one up.

I want to reserve the rest of my comments for issues pertaining to what I think are very serious in my community and how this budget implementation bill does not deal with them.

I represent the riding of Vancouver East. It is a wonderful riding, full of activists and great neighbourhoods, and yet right now in the city of Vancouver there is a crisis taking place. The seven Vancouver homeless emergency action team shelters are slated to close by April 30.

Those shelters have been providing a safe, warm, appropriate place for people to go where there is a laundry facility, food, good management and care for about 600 people a night. There was a lot of suspicion that these shelters were put up just for the Olympics. Hundreds of thousands of people were in our city for the Olympics. We were all aware that we had a serious homelessness and housing affordability crisis in our city. These shelters were opened and they have provided support to people. That has been very important. Now they are going to close.

In fact, there has been a very public conflict going on between the province of B.C. and the city of Vancouver as to what will happen with these shelters. What is remarkable to me is that the federal government has not said one word. There is nothing about the federal homelessness partnering strategy and that maybe it could provide some assistance with these shelters now slated to be closed and the fact that there will be hundreds of people out on the street. It is just so staggering to understand what is taking place.

• (1715)

We are dealing with issues in my community that are deeply systemic. This housing crisis has gone on for two decades. It started with the former Liberal government that eliminated all of the housing programs. My Bill C-304 would try to get the federal government back into housing by working with the provinces, municipalities, first nations and civil society.

This crisis is incredible to me. People are out on the street in our city right now and more people will be out on the street because these shelters are going to close down.

The annual homeless count that was done on March 23 showed that the number of homeless people in Vancouver had increased 12% from 2008 from 1,576 people to 1,762 people. Those are numbers but we also need to think about this in terms of individual people. We need to think about the impact on people's lives when they do not know where they will go each night, do not have access to proper food, do not have a decent income, do not have proper shelter assistance to keep out of the cold and wet weather and do not have access to laundry facilities. These figures are staggering.

The only good news, if there is any good news, is that 1,300 of those 1,700 homeless people were in shelters. In fact, the number of people in shelters has increased, which is good, but, as I said before, these shelters will be closing.

I have to question the government with this budget implementation bill that is nearly 900 pages long as to why there is nothing in the budget that will help the City of Vancouver deal with this crisis as it tries to cope with the costs. It costs the city about \$7 million to keep these shelters open when the federal government could be doing that.

The City of Vancouver, like other municipalities, relies on the property tax base. It does the best it can in stretching every single dollar. It has gone more than its distance and more than its responsibility in ensuring that these shelters are operating. It did get some assistance from the provincial government but most of that is now coming to an end.

This raises a very stark contrast. On the one hand, we see a budget that continues with outrageous tax breaks to corporations in the billions of dollars, robbing the public purse of desperately needed revenue, and on the other hand, we see communities, like the Downtown Eastside and other communities across the country, where people are destitute on the street and do not know where they will go each night.

A budget is about disclosing the real priorities and the real objectives of a government. We have had so much emphasis and focus on crime bills and little boutique bills. We have had so much overemphasis on law enforcement and tough on crime measures that will solve every problem we have, but we have deeply systemic and complex social issues in the urban environment, whether it is a lack of funds for public transit, lack of funds for housing or lack of funds for child care. People are literally struggling each month to get by.

The plight of homeless people is quite shocking but it affects a broader segment of society too. I know lots of working folks where both parents are working and making minimum wage or maybe a bit more and they are struggling to keep up with exorbitant child care costs, even if they can get into child care.

In addressing Bill C-9, the budget implementation act, I want to put it right out there that this is an outrage and a shame in terms of what the government has not done to address some of these ongoing and deeply systemic issues in our country. The gap is growing between wealth and poverty. More Canadians are falling into an environment where they cannot make ends meet.

• (1720)

We saw a wonder film the other night *Poor no More* that was premiered here on Parliament Hill hosted by Mary Walsh that showed so well in a very articulate way what is taking place for the working poor. These are people who are working, many of whom are getting a minimum wage. It showed how people are struggling and are actually living below the poverty line.

This is a bad budget implementation bill because it does not deal with what needs to be dealt with in my community and other communities. I hope that we can convince other members of the House not to support it.

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[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, the member mentioned that the Conservative government is using the budget implementation bill to exploit the Liberals' weakness by sneaking in things that have been debated in the House, such as Bill C-44, concerning Canada Post.

They are using the budget implementation bill and the Liberals' weakness to introduce the privatization of Canada Post's international mail services.

The member did not talk about this, but I would like to know what she thinks about the impact this measure, which targets Canada Post, would have on rural areas.

[*English*]

Ms. Libby Davies: Madam Speaker, I would agree. What on earth does the privatization and deregulation of Canada Post have to do with a budget bill? However, it is stuck right in the bill. Maybe the Conservatives were hoping that no one would notice, but it was pretty glaring that it was there and of course its impact will be enormous, particularly on smaller communities.

Many of us in the House, and I know our colleagues in the Bloc Québécois share this as well, that smaller and rural communities have suffered tremendously from cutbacks at Canada Post. It used to be that we had good service but now many of the postal outlets and offices have been removed. People have to rely on supermailboxes and so the service in rural Canada has seriously deteriorated.

I live in an urban environment so I am not so familiar with those changes, but I know my other colleagues have raised that in the House. The Conservatives are trying to use this Trojan Horse approach and move this about Canada Post through a budget bill. On those grounds alone we should be rejecting the bill and calling it for what it is. It is really fraudulent that they would try to do it in this way in a budget bill.

• (1725)

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to change the channel a little and ask the hon. member, who I know has a very deep interest in the arts, about something on page 305 of this budget document where it talks about the cultural crown corporations. There are five lines in the entire budget about cultural crown corporations.

To paraphrase it, it says that all the cutting and slashing has already been done so we do not have to do anything more specific in terms of savings because everything is working out pretty good it seems with CBC, and the Canadian Council for the Arts, the National Film Board and Telefilm Canada. However, that is not what the stakeholders in those organizations tell me and that is not what listeners of regional radio and television programming of CBC say to me in the Maritimes.

I wonder what the situation is out west. With her broad experience with the arts and cultural crown corporations, what can she tell me about the devastation the government has visited upon CBC, NFB and Telefilm, et cetera?

Ms. Libby Davies: Madam Speaker, here again is a very good example of what is buried within the budget implement bill. The whole issue of the public broadcaster and funding for the arts. I

know many of us are actually part of the arts caucus that reflects members from different parties, but we are very concerned about the state of arts and culture in Canada.

The member is right to point out that buried in this document there are a few lines that somehow say that we should not worry, that everything is okay, but the reality is that our public broadcaster, as well as our cultural institutions, have suffered enormously. We should know that an investment in the arts and culture and in artists is very beneficial to society as a whole in terms of not only cultural benefits, but also in economic benefits.

This idea that within the bill everything is okay for arts and culture is just another fraud that is being put through in this budget implementation bill.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I think we are on the verge of accepting what may be one of the great parliamentary travesties of the early 21st century. It relates to the comments just made by the previous speaker. If any one of us have looked through this bill, we will see that it is massive in scope. It is not just a budget implementation bill.

Normally in a budget implementation bill there will be a ways and means motion to implement, but it is amazing how few things were in the ways and means motion and how many things are in the budget bill itself.

I am going to bet everyone around here dollars to donuts that about a year from now, unless this is a serious legislative problem, the members on that side of the House will be debating something and they will look to this side of the House and say to the members, "You voted against that measure."

How many measures will we be voting on in this budget? If we bundle all of the income tax measures into just one item and all of the GST-HST items into just one time that is two items, and I still count 27 separate pieces of legislative change.

I will just talk about me. I get one vote on 27 separate statutory amendments and policy changes. How does that allow me as a parliamentarian to consider, deliberate, debate and analyze what is in a bill that comes forward as a government confidence measure? How fair or appropriate is that?

• (1730)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper. The hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River will have seven minutes when this debate resumes.

*Private Members' Business***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS***[English]***PROTECTION OF INSIGNIA OF MILITARY ORDERS,
DECORATIONS AND MEDALS ACT**

The House resumed from March 11 consideration of the motion that Bill C-473, An Act to protect insignia of military orders, decorations and medals of cultural significance for future generations, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona has five minutes left in his comments.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to the bill. We are now in the second hour of debate. I spoke for a few minutes in the last hour, so I will continue.

I think every member of the House sees merit in Bill C-473 and will support it. Therefore, we thank the member for Perth—Wellington for having brought the bill before the House. It deals with the transfer of insignia of military orders, decorations and medals of cultural significance to persons who are not residents of Canada.

The member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, our NDP caucus spokesperson on this issue, has a similar bill, Bill C-208, in the House. Although it is not exactly the same, it is similar enough that he hopes that when we get the bill to committee, he may be able to get parts of his bill adopted by the members into this bill to make it a better one.

In essence, the position the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore on this bill is he would like to see the currency taken out of the equation. He feels the medals should be viewed as unsaleable to anyone and when they are not longer required by the families of people who had the medals, they should be put in a repository such as a museum or he even suggested MPs' offices. There are many methods for dealing with the different types of military orders and decorations.

I spent considerable time on this issue and I looked forward to getting into the history. The more I read about the issue, the more interesting I found this matter.

I thought it was best to start at the beginning, so I went back to Roman times. That is when medals were first created. The Romans developed a complex hierarchy of military honours, ranging from crowns that were presented to senior officers to mark victories in major campaigns. There was a discussion around metal discs and other types of metals.

Then we got into the era of the Spanish Armada in 1588 during the reign of Elizabeth I, when she issued commemorative metals to mark England's victory over the Spanish Armada.

Then we moved on to the days of Oliver Cromwell. He issued medals to people who participated in the Battle of Dunbar. Then we got to the time of 1815 when medals were awarded to people who served during the Battle of Waterloo. I just saw a program a couple of weeks ago on the issue of Napoleon's history in France, ending with the Battle of Waterloo.

There is a storied history going back to Roman days involving medals. In fact, Canada has a long history of medals. It started with the governors of New France desiring to establish European honours in Canada. They established a Military Order of Malta in New France between 1635 and 1648.

• (1735)

After the establishment of the British North America Act, Canadians were entitled to receive British imperial honours, though the awarding was not consistently allowed. Besides knighthoods, peerage titles, both hereditary and in life, that were also bestowed on Canadians, sometimes it was uniquely Canadian designations, such as Baroness Macdonald of Earncliffe and Baron Beaverbrook of Beaverbrook, in the province of New Brunswick.

The fact is over time these medals more and more became—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. I regret to inform the member that his time is up.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Don Valley West.

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I begin by thanking the hon. member for Perth—Wellington for bringing this bill forward. I find it to be a thoughtful and balanced approach to this issue. It is the kind of thing that a private member's bill should do. It is a contribution to public policy and to the honouring of veterans in our country.

I have been requesting the members on this side of the House, in the Liberal Party, to support this bill, and we will support it at committee.

It is quite an adequate bill because it balances the cultural heritage that we try to protect through the honouring of insignia, of medals and honours, declarations and awards, as well as the private property rights of individuals. The member has been very thoughtful in balancing those two needs to understand that medals for wartime service and for military service, in general, tell two stories. They tell a story of an individual and a service to our country and to our world and a moment of heroism often that is honoured in a medal. They also tell a corporate story about what Canada is, how Canada has come into being and what Canada hopes to be in the future.

This legislation balances those two stories as well as those two rights. We have the story of individuals who offer their lives for service and give what they can for the prospects of freedom, independence, peace and community in our world. They also, at the same time, tell the story of a country that is emerging as a nation. The stories we have of these medals, as we can look at them, tell the story of a nation that has taken its place in the stage of world affairs and has made our world a better place.

It is very clear that I believe this is good legislation. It promotes culture and heritage in Canada and it balances the need for a family to tell its own story. It respects the right of a family to pass on a medal, or a declaration, or an award, from generation to generation, to kin, to keep it in that family so it can tell the story of the person it loved and respected.

Private Members' Business

It also gives the right of first refusal to Canadian cultural institutions, particularly, the Museum of Civilization across the river, the War Museum, as well as that network of Canadian Forces museums, which offer a story that we all need to hear. The member has taken that and has done it very well.

The need for such legislation is interesting. There is already an act in place that protects such medals that are 50 years or older. This adds to the legislative body that we have to protect modern medals. The act that the member is attempting to add to not only is looking at the history of Canada, but it is actually guarding the future of Canada. Therefore, we also want to commend him for that, for being forward-looking.

There are a couple of issues that I want to raise, and this is not a criticism to the bill but to add to the importance of it.

First, many people have served in Canadian Forces in the last 40 years or 50 years who have not received medals. I hope the member will also begin to look at the proposed Governor General's volunteer service award for those who have served at least one year and have not received a medal for their volunteering into the Canadian Forces.

There was such a medal that ended in 1947. It came back during the Korean War, in those two to three years. However, since that time, we have not had a medal that honours the simple act, or the very brave act, of volunteering for the Canadian Forces.

This is for people who have volunteered, particularly, in the cold war. We have to remember that kind of service. That will make this kind of legislation quite important, because we are talking about new medals and modern medals. I hope the member will take some time to investigate that proposal. Over 5,000 people have signed a petition for Parliament to establish such a medal.

On a bit of a harder note, one of the reasons this legislation is important is because there have been stories of people, of veterans, selling their medals to actually live. We have to worry about that.

● (1740)

I want to bring to the attention of the House the fact that there exists in Calgary a food bank solely for veterans. The Prime Minister visited the food bank on April 2, with the Minister of the Environment. It is an utter national shame that we have a food bank, the poppy fund in Calgary, just for veterans. There is something wrong when we are forcing our veterans to go to the measures of staying in homeless shelters, of selling medals, of going to food banks designed just for them. The Calgary poppy fund has to operate to keep veterans alive.

The budget for that food bank is \$2 million per year. I am not belittling the charitable notion that goes into keeping that alive. It is a wonderful charitable effort. However, the fact that the need exists should remind us that we as a Parliament and the government are simply not doing enough for veterans.

Over 61 people received food baskets in that institution in the last several weeks. It is open five days a week, from nine to five, Monday to Friday, to help veterans. Calgary is one of the richest cities in the country. This is about people who have given their service, their time, their honour, everything to the service of the country. What we are doing for our veterans is simply not good enough.

We have stories of veterans who sell their medals on eBay, sending them out of the country. I am very pleased the member is trying to protect that cultural heritage and keep them in our country, keep that story alive. However, as with everything, we have to dig down, we have to peel back the onion just a bit to understand why people might sell medals. If it is because they do not have enough to eat, if it is because they do not have a roof over their heads, if it is because they have been left out, if it is because they have addictions or other problems that are forcing them into a life outside the mainstream, then we have to act. It is not good enough. It is simply not the way we want to treat our veterans.

I know the hon. member has veterans absolutely foremost in his mind, so I hope he will take this opportunity to talk to the veterans who may be tempted to sell their medals. I hope he can go to that food bank, following his leader's example. That was just a photo op to make an announcement about food protection. It was an opportunity to talk to those veterans and ask them why they were there, to ask them what happened and what went on in their lives that took them to the brink and caused them to go to the Calgary Drop-In.

It has between 30 and 35 veterans every night who are homeless. This is a national shame. It is one of the largest growing populations of homeless in Canada. It is one of the largest growing populations of those going to food banks. We do not want to follow the model of our American neighbours, where this is a national crisis, although it is not that yet in Canada. We want to take the kinds of steps, the kinds of services, the kinds of programs to ensure that does not happen. We need to evaluate our programs and our commitment to Canadian veterans.

There is a story of a veteran that was recently made into a vignette by the Historica Dominion Institute. It is the story of Tommy Prince, the most decorated aboriginal, first nations veteran in Canadian history, born in 1915. One of the tragedies of that story is despite the fact that his bravery and his service led to him being the most decorated first nations veteran, when he came back to Canada, he did not find his place that he deserved in this society. He was forced to sell his medals. This is a real story of a real person, of a real veteran who got lost along the way.

This legislation will protect the medal, but will it protect the veteran? It is a first step to ensure cultural heritage is protected, but we have to go a further step. We have to go further to ensure that our veterans are never forced to sell their medals, that they are never forced to go to a food bank in Calgary, that they are never forced to go to the Calgary Drop-In, but that they are celebrated, treated fairly, economically and socially. We owe our lives, our freedom and our independence to them.

● (1745)

Mr. Tim Uppal (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in support of Bill C-473 and the protection of military medals, orders and decorations awarded to Canadians.

Private Members' Business

I want to begin by thanking the member for Perth—Wellington for his efforts to protect Canada's military heritage and for bringing this issue before Parliament.

The tabling of Bill C-473 allows us to reflect on the vital importance of Canada's military heritage and the very important part it plays in our country's development.

Military insignia symbolize a number of events, the most common representing long or distinguished service, while still others denote participation in a war, campaign or peacekeeping mission. The rarest of all signify battlefield valour.

The importance of our military heritage was front and centre just recently on April 9, Vimy Ridge Day, when the government honoured all of Canada's World War I servicemen and women and paid tribute to their achievements and contributions. Ceremonies of remembrance were held across Canada and at the Canadian National Vimy Memorial in France and the Canada Memorial at Green Park in London.

The national commemorative ceremony at the National War Memorial, a symbol of the sacrifices of all Canadians who have served Canada in times of war in the cause of peace and freedom, was especially poignant following the death in February of Canada's last known first world war veteran, John Babcock.

The efforts and sacrifices of Canada's armed forces throughout our history must not be forgotten. As part of our country's heritage, they must be honoured and protected.

Through Bill C-473, the member for Perth—Wellington proposes to fill a gap in the protection of our military heritage, a gap that affects modern military insignia. Let me explain what I mean by that. Important medals and other decorations that are more than 50 years old are already protected under the Cultural Property Export and Import Act. We have measures in place to keep objects of outstanding significance and national importance in the country. The act includes, among other elements, a system of cultural property export control, which requires export permits for a range of cultural property. These measures protect the nation's heritage, while respecting the rights of private citizens to dispose of their own property.

Under the existing act, important medals that are more than 50 years old require a permit to leave Canada. Permanent export may be delayed if the medal is determined to be of outstanding significance and of national importance. If an object for which a permit is sought is deemed to be of outstanding significance and national importance, the permit is refused. That refusal may be appealed to the Canadian Cultural Property Export Review Board.

On appeal, the board may create a delay period of up to six months to allow Canadian cultural institutions the opportunity to purchase the object in question so that it may remain in Canada. A system of special tax incentives also exists to provide further encouragement for owners to donate or sell cultural property to Canadian institutions. Those who do not comply with the Cultural Property Export and Import Act can be prosecuted and are subject to fines or imprisonment.

However, what protection is there for modern Canadian insignia? We know that serving members of Canadian armed forces are prohibited under the code of service discipline of the National Defence Act from selling their medals and decorations. Military regulations also govern the disposition of medals when a serving member dies. These measures are important and should be respected. However, recent military honours, unlike historic medals, orders and decorations, are not controlled for export.

● (1750)

The member for Perth—Wellington has indicated that his objective with Bill C-473 is to keep important military medals, orders and decorations in Canada. Export control is clearly a matter over which the federal government has jurisdiction and experience. Important medals and other decorations that are more than 50 years old are already controlled for export under the Cultural Property Export and Import Act.

If it is the will of the House to refer Bill C-473 to committee for review, I trust there will be an opportunity to study more fully how to ensure this proposed new legislation can work seamlessly with the Cultural Property Export and Import Act to protect our military heritage. I want to commend my colleague from Perth—Wellington for striking a balance in presenting this bill, between the need to protect our military heritage and the need to respect the rights of individual owners of military insignia.

Military insignia hold significant meaning to veterans and their heirs. Bill C-473 proposes to exempt near relatives of the owner of the insignia from the provisions of the bill. Under Bill C-473, families can continue to care for the valued personal legacy of their veterans, their military insignia, and ensure they will be passed down from generation to generation.

In the first hour of debate on Bill C-473, my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé noted that spouses do not seem to be included in the definition of the relative. I trust there will be an opportunity to study this matter further in committee. I also acknowledge and appreciate my colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore and the passion for this issue that he brings to this debate. In his comments, he described the positive experiences of several communities in his area to preserve their military heritage.

Many military insignia are donated to local museums as well as to the Canadian War Museum and Canadian Forces museums across the country. Bill C-473 would not restrict donations to Canadian museums. Owners would still be able to donate military insignia to the Canadian museum of their choice. That is an important protection of their rights.

Most public museums in Canada are also registered charities. As a registered charity, a museum can issue donation receipts for the value of gifts in kind, such as artifacts or specimens. Additional tax benefits may also be available if the gift is certified as being of cultural importance and national significance by the Canadian Cultural Property Export Review Board.

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The government has recognized the need to protect our military heritage through the establishment of museums, including the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the Canadian War Museum and the Canadian Forces museums across the country. The Canadian Museum of Civilization and the Canadian War Museum have more than 1,000 medals, including at least 28 Victoria Crosses, Canada's highest military honour. The network of Canadian Forces museums tells the story of regiments across the country.

Bill C-473 proposes that federal museums should be given the opportunity to purchase modern military insignia if the owners do not wish to donate them to a public museum or wish to transfer the insignia to a near relative or heir or a resident of Canada. I would hope that Canadian Forces museums would also be able to benefit from Bill C-473 to continue their profound tradition of protecting our military heritage.

In conclusion, I am pleased to support Bill C-473 and its efforts to protect our modern military insignia, modern insignia that recognize the contribution of the women and men who still today go to troubled spots around the world. I look forward to further study of the proposed bill in committee.

• (1755)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to speak to Bill C-473, An Act to protect insignia of military orders, decorations and medals of cultural significance for future generations.

I met with the members of the Hudson Legion last week. I am always moved when I speak with veterans. Each medal and decoration marks an event in their military career and the role they played in various theatres of operation. I met with a number of veterans when I worked on the issue of Canadians who had lost their citizenship. These people were commonly known as Lost Canadians. They also take a great interest in the transfer of the last veterans hospital. They talked to me about the situation many of them are in and how they live in poverty. It is very disturbing. I believe we must do much more for them.

The bill has to do with part of our heritage and is intended to protect medals that were presented to soldiers who brought honour to us. I would first like to thank the member for Perth—Wellington for introducing this bill. It is a first step, but I believe that he will agree that we can do much more for these veterans.

I am also surprised at the narrow definition given to “veterans”, because many members of allied forces fought alongside our veterans, as the department currently defines them. Even though these people have been in Canada for 40 or 50 years, they still do not have privileged access to Ste. Anne's Hospital. We still have a lot of work to do on this.

As its title indicates, Bill C-473 is designed to protect Canadian medals and insignia of military orders that are culturally significant to Canada. The cultural significance of a decoration is determined by the regulations in this case. To keep decorations in Canada, the bill we are debating today would place tighter restrictions on the transfer of insignia of military orders, decorations and medals. It would be against the law to transfer an insignia of cultural significance to a

non-resident, that is to say, someone who is neither a permanent resident nor a citizen of Canada. I encourage the committee that, I hope, will study this bill to review certain passages pertaining to citizenship.

I do not know if the member for Perth—Wellington realizes it, but more veterans have lost their citizenship. The last surviving veteran of World War I, Mr. Babcock, was not a Canadian citizen and the Prime Minister had to hop on a plane to restore it. The citizenship aspect should be revisited to prevent creating further irritants for veterans. Therefore, I invite the committee to examine this point and to do some checking.

This bill contains provisions that would allow any person to transfer a decoration provided that they have first tried to sell it at its fair market value to the Canadian War Museum, the Canadian Museum of Civilization or the Department of Canadian Heritage, in other words the Government of Canada. If the government refuses to purchase it and provides written confirmation to this effect or has not accepted the offer within 120 days after receiving it, the person may then transfer the decoration to a non-resident. As I mentioned, a number of veterans did not regain their Canadian citizenship before dying. That was the case for Mr. Vallière, among others. We should empathize with this situation, especially for the family's sake.

Bill C-374 indicates that all these restrictive measures do not apply to the transfer of a decoration to a near relative, which means the father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, child, grandchild, brother or sister of the owner of an insignia. At this stage, I find it unacceptable that spouses are excluded from this bill. I believe that this oversight will be corrected by the committee.

For people who do comply with the provisions of the bill, specific paragraphs in the bill stipulate that if a Canadian transfers a decoration considered “cultural property” in violation of the provisions I just mentioned, that person is committing an offence punishable by a fine in an amount that does not exceed five times the market value of the insignia. I would like to know how the government will contact the owners of insignia and medals. Is there a list of these persons? I also wonder how veterans will be advised of the changes proposed in this bill.

• (1800)

In the past, we have had a difficult time reaching veterans, even for a law as important as the Citizenship Act. So this will be an important part of the implementation of this bill.

The Bloc Québécois is in favour of the principle of Bill C-473 and would like it to be examined in committee. That will give us an opportunity to hear from witnesses and examine various aspects of the bill in greater depth.

We are also in favour of the principle of the bill because it is intended to conserve and protect heritage artifacts. Such artifacts are part of the military history of any country that presents military insignia, orders, decorations and medals to men and women to thank them for their actions and for their participation in various military missions.

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In bestowing these decorations, a country recognizes the sacrifices and achievements of those who have served the cause of peace and freedom throughout the world over the years. Everyone here knows that our military personnel work hard and overcome many challenges. Many sustain serious injury, and some die.

Without hesitation, they accept the most dangerous missions with humility, determination and courage. Collectively, we have an obligation to recognize and support these soldiers.

We believe that all governments can and must do what they can to preserve the cultures and histories of the peoples under their authority. Military history and recognition of the dedication of the men and women in uniform are important parts of the history of a people.

That said, I must point out that the bill introduced by the member aims to protect a cultural asset that is military in nature.

The Conservatives wish to prove their willingness to preserve military history. Although we support this praiseworthy initiative, the Bloc Québécois urges the Conservative government to take concrete action to support the entire cultural sector.

We support the bill to protect one form of military culture. However, we insist that this government invest more in the protection and promotion of the culture and history of Quebec.

I would like to close by pointing out that for many veterans, medals are very important and so is the history behind every one of them.

The fact that enacting such a bill might be difficult and might touch some nerves must not be taken lightly.

I would also like the government to do more to address the poverty that prevails in that community.

[*English*]

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House tonight to speak to Bill C-473, An Act to protect insignia of military orders, decorations and medals of cultural significance for future generations.

Canadian veterans have helped to ensure that we live in a free country and have aided in spreading peace and security throughout the world. They have done that with courage, determination and at great sacrifice. In bestowing military medals, decorations and orders, our country recognizes the sacrifices and achievements of those who have served and those who serve today.

The men and women who wear those medals do so with pride, devotion, loyalty and dignity. Yet, when I have had the chance to speak with veterans in my hometown of Hamilton, like the exceptional men and women at Royal Canadian Legion Branch 163 on the Mountain, it is also clear that they are wearing those medals for the 118,000 Canadians who served their country and never had the chance to wear theirs because they made the ultimate sacrifice. From that perspective there can be little doubt that the principles underlying Bill C-473 deserve our support.

As the member for Perth—Wellington rightly pointed out in his opening remarks, some medals and honours are already protected in legislation. More than 30 years ago, at a time when World War II and

the Korean War were still fresh in our memories, the Government of Canada responded to the need to protect Canada's heritage by introducing the Cultural Property Export and Import Act. It requires export permits for a range of cultural property, including medals. Yet, it offers that protection only if the military medals, orders and decorations are at least 50 years old.

More recent military honours therefore are not controlled for export. They may be freely sold and taken out of the country, out of the reach of Canadians and our public museums. I agree with the member for Perth—Wellington that this is wrong, but I am not sure that the bill, as currently written, is the best vehicle for achieving our shared objective.

Let me take a few moments here to outline some of my concerns with the view to getting the bill to committee and hopefully having most of them addressed before we have to take the third and final vote in the House. I want to start by reading the summary of Bill C-473. It states:

This enactment places restrictions on the transfer of insignia of military orders, decorations and medals of cultural significance to persons who are not residents of Canada.

In essence, that is what this bill is all about. It suggests that military medals will be kept in Canada because they will no longer be transferrable to someone who is neither a citizen nor a permanent resident of Canada. On that general point, I have no quarrel. But I am not sure that the bill achieves that objective.

First, let us look at paragraphs 3(2)(a) and (b) which state that the prohibition on exporting medals does not apply to the transfer of an insignia to a near relative of the owner of the insignia. Paragraph (b) refers to an heir of the owner of the insignia upon the death of the owner. Obviously, both the near relative and the heir of the owner could reside outside of Canada.

If the goal of the bill is to keep all medals in Canada, the bill before us today does not achieve that objective. I believe that the exceptions are reasonable, but it is unclear to me whether this was a deliberate or an inadvertent outcome of the bill as drafted. Perhaps even more troubling is the exclusion of spouses in the definition of a near relative. The bill talks about parents, children, brothers, sisters, grandparents and heirs. Perhaps it is assumed that spouses will be heirs, but I think that the inclusion of spouses ought to be made explicit.

In bestowing military orders, decorations and medals, our country is recognizing the sacrifices and achievements of those who have served the cause of peace and freedom throughout the world, but the sacrifices made by family members, as their loved ones serve our country, must also be acknowledged and spouses in particular deserve special recognition. In this bill I would strongly urge that the inclusion of spouses be made explicit.

The next issue I would like to address can best be expressed by comparing the bill that is before us today to a similar bill that was introduced by my NDP colleague, the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore. I think members on all sides of the House would agree that veterans have no stronger advocate in the House than the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore. He introduced a similar bill long before the one that we are debating today was tabled, but as the luck of the draw would have it, we are debating Bill C-473 today rather than his bill, Bill C-208.

● (1805)

I said that it was a similar bill deliberately. They share the same goal, but in my view Bill C-208 takes a better, more comprehensive approach. Its summary states:

This enactment prohibits the sale or export for sale of any medal awarded by the Government of Canada in respect of service with the Canadian Forces or the Royal Canadian Mounted Police or in respect of service as a police officer outside Canada on behalf of the Government of Canada.

It differs from the bill before us today with two important respects. First, it includes medals awarded to the RCMP or any other police officer who serves our country outside Canada. As we know, many police officers serve overseas, and the medals they receive honour their courage, valour and selfless contribution to our international efforts. Why would we treat their medals any differently than we would the medals of veterans?

If the intent of this bill is to preserve our heritage, then clearly RCMP honours ought to be protected as well. I do not believe there would be a huge backlash from veterans on this point. In fact, when the NDP's Bill C-201 was before this House, not a single veteran complained to me that it dealt with pension fairness for both veterans and the RCMP. On the contrary, the only backlash about that bill was that the Liberals and the Conservatives defeated every clause of the bill in committee, thereby keeping in place the unfair existing system that unjustly reduces the pension benefits of retired and disabled Canadian Forces and RCMP personnel.

The second difference between the bill that is before us today and Bill C-208 is equally important. Bill C-208 does not just prevent medals from being exported out of the country, it actually prohibits the sale of those medals. That is a crucial distinction.

Medals and insignia are priceless honours. Men and women wear them with pride as a sign of their loyalty, devotion and dignity. Such medals should never be turned into currency. By allowing medals to be sold, we are turning honours into commodities.

I share the view of those members in this House who want to prohibit such sales. In doing so, I am not however underestimating the dire financial need that many veterans are experiencing today. I can fully appreciate that many veterans feel that they have to sell their medals as one of the last resorts for making ends meet.

My goodness, surely we can all agree that such circumstances are a national disgrace. It is a situation that reflects badly not on the veterans but on the successive Liberal and Conservative governments that say they support our troops but, in fact, provide little real support when they return home.

Just this past Good Friday, there was a story in the news from Calgary where I guess the Prime Minister thought he was staging a

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positive photo-op by helping out at a food bank. However, it was a veterans food bank. Over 40 veterans rely on that food bank on a regular basis. Here is what George Bittman, chair of the Calgary Poppy Fund said to the media about that food bank:

The facility is used by vets who feel too proud to ask for help from a civilian food bank. And with so many veterans without pensions, there is a great need for donations of food. Like most Second (World) War veterans and Korean War veterans, if their problems weren't apparent at the time they were discharged, they were happy to get the hell out of the service and get on with life, just as I did when I got out of the navy. Forty years later, when something comes up that something goes sideways, it's generally too late for them to make a claim with Veterans Affairs. Records are lost, memories fade.

At that point there are few options available to veterans, other than turning to food banks. It is an absolute disgrace.

Bill C-201 would have gone a long way to providing meaningful help to veterans by improving their pension. So would the implementation of the NDP veterans first motion, which was passed by this House as far back as 2006.

If that motion were acted on in a comprehensive way, there would not be a clawback of SISIP anymore, there would not be a so-called gold-digger clause in the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act, the VIP would have been extended to all widows of all veterans, the survivor pension amount would have been increased from 50% to 66%, and the deduction from the annuity of retired and disabled Canadian Forces members would have been eliminated.

That is how we really support our troops, not by allowing them to sell their medals but by providing them with a decent standard of living. For their service to our country, veterans deserve so much more than just rhetoric from this Parliament. They deserve a retirement with dignity and respect.

● (1810)

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues from all parties for the support on my private member's bill, Bill C-473.

On any given day, approximately 8,000 Canadian Forces personnel are preparing for, engaging in, or are returning from an overseas mission. They follow in the footsteps of Canadians who for more than 200 years have answered the call and sacrificed all they knew, all the comforts, love and safety of home in order to defend the freedoms of others.

The efforts and sacrifices of Canada's armed forces throughout history and as we speak must not be forgotten.

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More than 30 years ago, at a time when World War II and the Korean war were still fresh in our memories, the Government of Canada responded to the need to protect Canada's heritage by introducing the Cultural Property Export and Import Act. This act seeks balance between the need to protect the nation's heritage and the property rights of private owners.

Regulations under the Cultural Property Export and Import Act specify categories of objects which require a permit to leave Canada for any reason temporarily or permanently. Military medals, orders and decorations are of course included but, like other protected objects, they must be 50 years old.

It is time for our modern medals to receive the same protection accorded to our historic medals and that is what this bill, Bill C-473, seeks to achieve.

Bill C-473 speaks to the importance of our military heritage. As well, it fills an important gap by focusing on Canada's modern military honours.

Bill C-473 will ensure that federal museums are given the opportunity to acquire and protect modern military medals, orders and decorations which are no less deserving than those given 50 or 100 years ago to brave Canadians.

This enactment places restrictions on the transfer of insignia of military orders, decorations and medals of cultural significance to persons who are not residents of Canada.

As the House knows, there are Canadians actively seeking to protect our military medals by keeping them in Canada. For example, Dave Thomson from St. George, Ontario, is known by many as the "medal detector" for his hobby of repatriating Canadian medals from Internet auction sites like eBay. He recently found three first world war medals belonging to Lance-Corporal Walter Clemens Leslie who was born in my riding of Perth—Wellington. I think they have been returned now to the Stratford Perth Museum.

In the same way, this bill still provides fair market value to anyone who wishes to sell an insignia awarded under the authority of Her Majesty in Right of Canada, but they must provide first right of refusal to the Government of Canada by submitting an offer to the Canadian War Museum, the Canadian Museum of Civilization or the Department of Canadian Heritage.

My inspiration for this bill comes from the veterans and future veterans from my riding and across Canada who serve or have served our country. This bill will ensure the accolades from their acts of bravery will remain on Canadian soil and will continue to honour them as part of our Canadian heritage.

• (1815)

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee.)

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[English]

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to continue the Liberals' attempt to get answers from the Minister of Natural Resources on the issue of government spending.

I asked almost a month ago for information regarding the awarding of an \$185,000 contract to a company chaired by a caucus colleague of the minister, the member for Calgary Centre. I have not yet received a real answer to this question, but not getting answers seems to be the trademark of the current government.

The Conservatives announced with great fanfare their Federal Accountability Act, yet the complete lack of accountability is evident by the current government's behaviour.

We have seen the Minister of Labour stonewall when confronted with serious allegations about the activities at the Toronto Port Authority. We have the former minister of foreign affairs whose resignation was given only when it became obvious that his indiscretions were about to become a public nuisance. We have a Minister of Fisheries whose son-in-law receives lucrative contracts from the government.

It seems obvious there is a pattern emerging with contracts and access going to current and former members of the Conservative caucus.

The Conservative Party campaigned on issues such as transparency and honesty, yet, once elected, it has become the most opaque and dishonest government this country has seen since the Mulroney years.

The last few days have seen question period focused on matters concerning the member for Simcoe—Grey, which again comes down to lack of transparency on behalf of the government and the Prime Minister. The majority of questions have been centred on asking why allegations of criminal misdeeds are being kept secret.

While I appreciate that matters under investigation have to be handled carefully, Canadians and parliamentarians have the right to know, at least in general terms, what area of the law may have been transgressed. Instead, each day we open the papers to see a variety of increasingly salacious headlines regarding the actions of the member and her husband.

The government trumpets its tough on crime agenda at every opportunity, yet, it is unusually silent when it comes to one of its own under suspicion.

Would the minister tell this House and Canadians at large why it seems that holding a membership card, expired or not, in the Conservative caucus gives that individual an inside track into receiving taxpayers' money?

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• (1820)

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member said that she came here in an attempt to get information on a specific subject. Obviously, her little diatribe was not about that. She should listen because here is a real answer that is connected directly to the question she asked in the House of Commons.

Streetlight Intelligence Incorporated is the developer and owner of innovative technology which reduces energy consumption for street lighting. It does so by reducing illumination during periods of low activity by remote and Internet interfaces. The technology has been piloted in British Columbia, with the support of BC Hydro.

Under the Government of Canada's clean air regulatory agenda, funding was authorized for Natural Resources Canada to enter into contribution agreements for collaborative projects that demonstrate technologies that promise to reduce energy use.

In the case of Streetlight Intelligence Incorporated, its technology could conceivably reduce the electricity consumption of street lights by up to 50%. There are four million to six million street lights in Canada, and it has been estimated that the electrical consumption of those street lights may make up to 30% of a municipality's electrical bill.

Projects for this program are chosen on the basis on the potential energy savings and the amount of support leveraged from other stakeholders. In view of its potential to reduce energy consumption, Natural Resources Canada's Office of Energy Efficiency considered the proposal from Streetlight Intelligence Incorporated.

As with any similar proposal, a panel of departmental program officers assessed the project under the criteria of the energy efficiency standards and labelling program. It was determined that the project satisfied all program criteria, as well as all other legal requirements of the Government of Canada.

Once all the requirements were met, and not before, and all documentation was received from Streetlight Intelligence Incorporated, the contribution agreement was finalized. Thus, the project from Streetlight Intelligence Incorporated met all program and financial criteria, making it eligible for funding.

A contribution agreement between Natural Resources Canada and Streetlight Intelligence Incorporated was subsequently completed, dated March 31, 2009.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, there is a pattern and that pattern is the lack of transparency, accountability and honesty. What transpired a month ago has now become very important for Canadians, and they have been asking: what is the government doing?

Last Friday the Prime Minister, in regard to the Minister of State for the Status of Women, said:

I've referred the allegations to the conflict of interest and ethics commissioner and to the RCMP.

Yet, this very morning the same ethics commissioner said:

I have not had an official request from the Prime Minister to investigate anything relating to [the member for Simcoe—Grey].

Why is it that the government in general and the Prime Minister in particular have such problems in clearly stating the truth?

The well paid spin doctors in the Prime Minister's Office seem to have their hands full. I think it is important that statements be clarified.

• (1825)

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed in the member opposite. I thought she was actually better than that. I think she needs to understand that as she tries to smear everyone else, she is just going to get mud on herself.

I want to point out that the proposal put forward by Streetlight Intelligence Incorporated, which is why we are here tonight, met all program and financial criteria under Government of Canada requirements. The potential for conflict of interest concerns was dealt with by all parties involved in the contribution agreement in accordance with legal advice.

Because it was clear that Canadians would benefit from the proposal put forward, a contribution agreement was completed between the Government of Canada and Streetlight Intelligence Incorporated.

AGRICULTURE

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have new words creeping into their vocabulary: global synchronized economic downturn, recalibration, and listeria outbreak, rather than preventable incident. This carefully crafted spin attempts to remove blame from the government and instead imply action when little or none is taken.

Listeriosis was a real tragedy that cost 22 Canadians their lives in 2008. Depending on what media advisory we read, it was either an outbreak or a preventable incident. If the spin was outbreak, it implied an act of God and was beyond the government's control. If the crisis was in fact a preventable incident, it was absolutely in its purview.

Following the listeriosis disaster, the government ordered a secretive inquiry into the deaths. Weatherill concluded:

We cannot wait for another food-borne emergency to occur and more lives to be lost before we act. While there will be costs in implementing some of these recommendations, the costs of inaction—whether measured by the damage to individual Canadians' lives, lost revenues and reputation for industry, or Canada's global competitiveness in an increasingly food safety conscious world—are far greater.

There were 57 recommendations in the Weatherill report, including: provinces should follow more strict safety rules; Ottawa should review the training of federal inspectors; manufacturers must design meat processing equipment that is easy to clean; and Canada's Chief Public Health Officer must take the lead in any future cases of food-borne illness.

Unfortunately, the government ignored the chief recommendation, namely, to have an independent third party verify whether there were enough meat inspectors.

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This past fall the American government warned Canada that its meat inspection procedures were too lenient. Had Canadians known, this would have caused us to wonder whether the current food safety regime was as effective as the federal government claimed.

Unless Ottawa took action, Washington might have forbidden the import of Canadian processed meat. As a result, Canada's agriculture minister promised the government would spend \$75 million over three years on meat inspection and would hire 70 new inspectors.

Regrettably, in March when I asked my question, it was over two years since the listeriosis tragedy and eight months since the Weatherill investigation, and little had changed. While the government claimed to be moving forward, one of its most over-used phrases, no additional inspectors had actually joined the front lines of food inspection according to the meat inspectors union.

Cameron Prince, vice-president of operations, CFIA, confirmed this fact in his clarification on how the agency would continue to move forward on the Weatherill report. He explained that CFIA had hired and was training 35 inspectors and that an additional 35 inspectors would be hired over the next year.

If in the words of the minister, food inspectors “don't grow on trees”, why did he not take immediate action to ensure enough examiners to avoid a second listeriosis outbreak? Moreover, what can another of Prince's comments actually mean, when he said, “We have adopted a policy of enhanced inspector presence at all federally registered meat processing plants—”?

The federal government continues to have some explaining to do about Canada's food safety system.

• (1830)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the House is well aware, the government is fundamentally committed to the continuous improvement of Canada's food safety system.

In fact the member knows that at the committee level, parliamentarians struck a very special committee on food safety. She participated in that committee, in very public hearings. We had many witnesses come in front of the committee, and that committee published an excellent report with good recommendations that have been taken into consideration by this government.

[*Translation*]

Immediately after the listeriosis outbreak in summer 2008, listeria testing procedures and reporting requirements were enhanced. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada quickly proceeded to review their activities and the measures taken during the outbreak in order to identify any shortcomings and to develop solutions for improving the coordination of federal and provincial efforts to monitor food safety and to fight food-borne illnesses.

The government has taken measures because Canadians and their commercial partners must be sure that the safety of Canada's food continues to be the top priority of the government's action program. The health of Canadians and the safety of food products in Canada remain among the government's top priorities.

[*English*]

On September 11, 2009, the government announced an investment of \$75 million and committed to act on all 57 recommendations set out in the Weatherill report, to strengthen our food safety system.

The government is moving forward on all 57 recommendations and is making measurable progress. Health Canada, PHAC and the CFIA have taken collaborative action focused on prevention, surveillance, detection and better emergency response. At this time, the majority of the recommendations are well under way, ongoing or completed. A full report on the progress of the Weatherill recommendations is available on CFIA's website at www.inspection.gc.ca. I invite my colleague to visit that site to make sure she remains current on this issue.

Do members know who agrees that our government is on the right track? The Liberal member for Malpeque and the spokesperson for the Liberal Party on food safety said, on March 15, “I personally believe that our food is safe”.

Perhaps my colleague in the Liberal Party should listen to her colleague in the Liberal Party.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, my colleague will remember that his committee actually thanked me for my work on the listeriosis report.

Worse than inaction was the fact that in March, we were under a second listeriosis crisis under the government's watch. University of Manitoba professor Holley wrote in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* in January about a study that found Canada's food safety system to be broken. He concluded that inspectors should be going after the source of contamination in food processing plants, rather than doing reactive calls after end-of-line inspections.

Tragically, 27 Canadians have now died in two separate crises. What will it take for the government to make food safety a priority? How many more listeriosis incidents will occur before the government backs its spin with inspectors?

In the spirit of accountability and protecting the health of Canadians, I call upon the government to table the status of each of the 57 recommendations made in the Weatherill report.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, as I just mentioned, the status of the 57 recommendations and their implementation is on the website I just listed when I last spoke.

The CFIA is dedicated to the task of enhancing Canada's food safety system and has implemented a range of initiatives as a result of the Weatherill recommendations. These include the hiring and training of 35 new inspectors of ready-to-eat meat, instituting new requirements for the control of listeria in federally registered plants that process ready-to-eat meat, enhancing laboratory capacity and research into the development of rapid test methods, and partnering with federal partners to identify new and better ways to deliver food safety messages to the public during outbreaks.

However the member does not have to take my word for it. I will conclude with two more quotes: "I'd say they are good" and "It's a pretty good system". The person who said those was Bob Kingston, who is the head of the food inspectors' union, and he made those comments last month during media interviews.

• (1835)

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Liberal critic for aboriginal affairs, I have been hearing from many of the affected groups and organizations concerning the end of funding for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. However, probably most important, we are hearing from individuals whose lives have been negatively impacted by the end of the funding, individuals who were reaching out and finding help, individuals who were on their healing journey.

In Labrador, despite being excluded from the residential schools agreement, several organizations in my riding had obtained Aboriginal Healing Foundation funding for work with former students. Those organizations were the Nunatsiavut government, which represents the self-governing Inuit of Labrador, and the Labrador Legal Services, which works with members of all three aboriginal cultures in Labrador, including the Innu, Métis and Inuit.

Both organizations operated important healing programs with this funding. People were telling their stories in a supportive environment. The programs were working, but it was only the tip of the iceberg. The programs were culturally appropriate. They were community driven. There were programs on the land. There were programs in the Labrador Correctional Centre. Again, the programs were working.

Throughout the country, projects funded by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation have worked with residential school survivors and aboriginal communities to move beyond the residential school legacy to provide healing and reconciliation at the individual and community levels.

Organizations and individuals across Canada have been very vocal in expressing to me and all members of Parliament their disappointment that the recent federal budget did not provide for a continuation of funding. I share that disappointment, especially given that all Canadians and the aboriginal people who have been served through the foundation have received excellent value for money.

The government's December 2009 evaluation report, which was submitted to Indian and Northern Affairs, found:

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—AHF healing programs at the community level are effective in facilitating healing at the individual level, and are beginning to show healing at the family and community level.

The report went on to recommend a continuation of Aboriginal Healing Foundation funding.

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation was an aboriginal organization run by aboriginal people for aboriginal people. The cuts to AHF undermine the residential schools apology and the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and display an ongoing lack of understanding on the part of the Conservative government. We ask the Conservative government that the funding to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation be restored.

Mr. John Duncan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation is still operating. It began in 1998 with its program and, as of now, we still have 22 of its locations still operating. Where it is not operating, which has been in many parts of the country, even in that 12-year period, we have Health Canada-funded clinics, most often community driven, in first nations communities.

We continue to have a moral and legal responsibility to continue to address the needs of all residential school survivors and their families. Funding is continuing and no one will be turned away based on the qualification that the individual is a survivor or a member of the family.

The lessons we have learned from the Aboriginal Healing Foundation have been very valuable. They have been very valuable remedial actions and that will be built into the Health Canada programming as well as at the community level.

• (1840)

Mr. Todd Russell: Mr. Speaker, it begs this question. If the Aboriginal Healing Foundation did so well and if there were great lessons to be learned from it, why would it be changed? Why would Health Canada now automatically assume all of the work of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation? Something was being done. Something was working. Why change it?

The government, by its own admission, said that it was working. Let us be honest here. There are going to be approximately 130 programs across the country that will evaporate because there will be no funding for them. These were culturally appropriate, culturally sensitive, community-focused programs. What does the parliamentary secretary say to all those hamlets in Nunavut that had community-based programming?

We have to remember that the Inuit only came on six years ago under the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. What do we say to all of those communities, particularly those communities in northern and remote areas, where there is a lack of presence of Health Canada? We had Health Canada in 1998 and we have Health Canada now. We had the Aboriginal Healing Foundation because it was doing something different and appropriate and it was working.

Adjournment Proceedings

Mr. John Duncan: Mr. Speaker, much has changed in the last 12 years. Much has changed in the last 6 years. We have many agreements and understandings at the community level. We have programming driven by the community level and funded by Health Canada. We have that available in more than 600 communities across the country. We have staffing that includes people involved in this field, one-third of whom are aboriginal. We have more than 400 aboriginal people involved. To say this is not community-driven or not sensitive to the needs of the aboriginal community is incorrect.

I think we will see a transition that will work very well, and the responsibilities are well recognized by the government.

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

(The House adjourned at 6:42 p.m.)

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