



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 146 • NUMBER 152 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, September 25, 2012

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

CONTENTS

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

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, September 25, 2012

The House met at 10 a.m.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

NUCLEAR TERRORISM ACT

Hon. Peter Van Loan (for the Minister of Justice) moved for leave to introduce Bill S-9, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time)

* * *

PETITIONS

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present from constituents in my riding of Wellington—Halton Hills. One has about 100 signatures and the other has about 50 signatures.

The petitioners are calling on members of Parliament to support Motion No. 312.

KATIMAVIK

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a number of petitions from Canadians in Quebec, Saskatchewan and right through to British Columbia who are calling upon Parliament to reinstate the Katimavik program, a program that was critical in uniting Canadians, particularly young Canadians, from coast to coast to coast and what it is to be a Canadian.

The petitioners are calling upon the government to reverse its previous decision to cut the limited funding that it offered to this program and to reinstate it immediately.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present two petitions today.

In the first petition, the petitioners are calling upon the government to abandon its unwise plan to eliminate the Experimental Lakes Area.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition has been signed by students at Lindsey Place High School in my riding.

The petitioners are calling upon the government to pressure the Chinese government to release Dr. Wang Bingzhang from prison on compassionate grounds so that he can be reunited with his family and friends.

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from constituents in my riding of Yorkton—Melville who ask us to support Motion No. 312. They indicate that we should confirm that every human being be recognized in Canadian law as a human by amending Section 223 of the Criminal Code in such a way as to reflect 21st century medical evidence.

[*Translation*]

ABORTION

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition signed by Canadians who oppose the Conservatives' Motion M-312, which is a thinly veiled attempt to reopen the abortion debate in Canada. Canadians had this debate decades ago, and people are ready to move on to other things. Canadians want to move toward true gender equality in Canada, not away from it.

[*English*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition concerning the Experimental Lakes Area.

The petitioners are asking the government to keep the experimental lakes area funded and open. This is a whole ecosystem research laboratory that has informed the government in the past, to help us make smart decisions about how to protect our freshwater resources, and will be able to continue to do so in the future. That is why these Canadians have asked the government to continue funding.

Routine Proceedings

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support a number of petitions referring to Canada's 400-year-old definition of human being and asking Parliament to bring that into the 21st century. The petitioners are asking Parliament to stand up for the principle that every human being is created equal and every human being has an inherent worth and dignity.

In particular, I have a petition with almost 300 signatures from the riding of Mississauga—Erindale. I have a petition with almost 400 signatures from Calgary, Saskatoon, Vancouver Island, London and Bruce Grey. I have petitions from the riding of Scarborough—Rouge River, which together accomplish almost 1,200 signatures, many of whom are women. I have a petition from the riding of Markham—Unionville, which together have almost 1,300 signatures. I have a petition to the same effect from the riding of Oak Ridges—Markham with 300 signatures. I also have a petition from the riding of Scarborough—Agincourt with almost 300 signatures.

I have received petitions from all across the country with thousands of signatures but I will stop there for today.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition signed by citizens who are concerned about the lack of a national public transit strategy. I raise this on the eve of Thanksgiving, the biggest weekend in northern Ontario for students coming home, when the McGuinty Liberals will kill public transit in the north and leave all our students high and dry.

The contempt for northerners is pretty clear but it is part of a larger problem which is that we have governments, federally and provincially, that do not seem to care about the issue of public transit, particularly for northern and rural communities.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I table a petition from residents of Winnipeg North who are stating that there are many needs that are more important than the need to increase the size of the House of Commons to 338 members of Parliament. Dealing with issues like OAS and so forth are far more important than increasing the number of politicians here in the House of Commons.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from a number of Canadians who are concerned about the proposed mega quarry in Melancthon township in Dufferin county, Ontario, which would be the largest open pit quarry in Canada at over 2,300 acres.

The petitioners are concerned with a number of things, one of which is that the proposed megaquarry would initially have 150 truckloads per hour of aggregates leave the quarry heading south and 150 empty truckloads returning to the quarry, and other trucks transporting 52 tons of explosives to the quarry per day on local roadways not designed to carry such traffic.

● (1010)

[Translation]

KATIMAVIK

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to present a petition urging the government to maintain the \$14 million budget for Katimavik. This petition is signed by people from across Canada who want the Minister of Canadian Heritage, the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister to maintain that funding.

In the course of my duties, I got to know a group of Katimavik participants who were working in the riding of Beauport—Limoilou, so I am very pleased to present this petition.

[English]

ABORTION

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition signed by women and men from across Canada who are opposed to Conservative Motion No. 312, a thinly veiled attempt to reopen the abortion debate in Canada, a debate that Canadians had decades ago and Canadians are ready to move on. Women and men in Canada look forward to moving forward and not backward and this is a very regressive motion. Finally, Canadians are looking forward to achieving true gender equality in Canada.

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this petition is from people from my riding. They all happen to be women but it just adds to the dozens of petitions with dozens of signatures of people who are in favour of Motion No. 312, and for whom the subject has not been closed.

[Translation]

KATIMAVIK

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present two petitions today.

The first urges the government to consider the negative impact that eliminating the Katimavik program will have on communities across Canada, as well as on non-profit organizations. The people who signed the petition want the government to consider maintaining funding for the program.

ABORTION

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is opposed to Motion M-312, which is a thinly veiled attempt to reopen a debate that has already taken place and that represents a step backward for women's equality.

[English]

BILL C-38

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a number of petitions from earlier this spring. The petitioners are concerned that we should not pass Bill C-38.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the current petitions I want to present are from signatories in my own riding, as well as from Ontario and Manitoba. The petitioners urge the government to press China on human rights issues. They are particularly concerned about the persecution of Falun Dafa and Falun Gong practitioners, adding to many concerns about the suppression of Tibetan monks, Catholics within China and so on.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I also have a petition signed by residents of British Columbia urging the government to set aside its favouritism toward the Enbridge Northern Gateway project and allow full, fair and un-time-limited discussion and study of the proposal.

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Hon. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise on behalf of the beautiful constituency of Kelowna—Lake Country. Hundreds of constituents have signed several petitions to deal with Motion No. 312 to address the 400-year-old definition of human being and asking Parliament to debate this in an open and transparent manner.

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Mr. François Pilon (Laval—Les Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to present a petition signed by hundreds of voters in my riding calling on the government to fulfill its international responsibilities by ensuring that Canada: contributes to foreign development; gives priority to funding NGOs that support Canadians whose funding was slashed by CIDA; and, finally, in the spirit of international solidarity, restores in full the funding for Development and Peace for the next five years.

[English]

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Rod Bruinoog (Winnipeg South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a few petitions to present this morning.

The first petition is from the good people of Willowdale who are asking the House to support Motion No. 312, which calls for an open-ended study as to when human life begins.

The second petition is from the people of Battlefords—Lloydminster. The good people of Saskatchewan are asking that 21st century medical evidence be considered in the open-ended study called for in Motion No. 312 which is before the House this week.

The third petition is signed by a number of people from Vancouver Island North who are also asking the House to support this open-ended study so we can perhaps come to some conclusion as to when human life begins.

●(1015)

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, I would seek the support of the House to momentarily return to presenting committee reports.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to revert to committee reports?

Business of Supply

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security concerning electronic monitoring.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109 of the House of Commons the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—INCOME INEQUALITY

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.) moved:

That the House call on the government to take several simple and immediate actions to reduce the growing income inequality in Canada including: (a) a roll back of its recent Employment Insurance Premium hikes which inflict a higher relative burden on low to modest income workers; (b) ending the punitive new claw back of Employment Insurance benefits that are discouraging many Canadians from working while on claim; (c) making tax credits, such as the Family Caregiver Tax Credit, refundable so that low income Canadians are not excluded; (d) making the Registered Disability Savings Plan available to sufferers of chronic diseases such as Multiple Sclerosis; and (e) removing interest charges from the federal component of student loans.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate very much the chance to address this issue in the House today. We all recognize, or at least most of us recognize, that income inequality is a growing issue. Whereas in the years between about 1945 and the mid-1990s, the growing economy created greater equality not only because of the well-paying jobs that were created but also because of a range of government programs that sustained people who were in difficulty.

Business of Supply

Since the governments came to grips with the impact of deficits in the early 1990s, right up until today and most emphatically in the last five years, we have seen a decline in income equality and we have seen a growth of inequality. Those are the undeniable facts.

If I could quote someone who is not a radical figure but a very responsible one, the Governor of the Bank of Canada said this recently in a speech in Halifax, on the subject of income inequality: "The people who say it's not an issue are wrong, and the people who say it is an issue and who then want to create class warfare are wrong. The focus needs to be on ensuring equality of opportunity.... It's a massive issue; fundamental to society. It's not right if big swaths of society become discouraged and marginalized."

What we have proposed today in the motion is quite practical. It is saying to the government and to the House that there is a series of very discrete and practical steps that we can take to reduce what is an undeniable trend that certainly has accelerated over the last five years because of the impact of two things.

First is the impact of the financial crisis, which has affected the entire world and has naturally had an impact on Canada in terms of rates of growth, the increase in joblessness, the increase in youth unemployment and the loss of well-paying manufacturing jobs, a trend we had seen over the last 30 years and we have seen it accelerate most recently. Second is because governments sometimes have taken steps that have in fact accelerated inequality rather than moving things in the other direction.

What we are asking the government to do is to, first of all, recognize that this is a problem, not to dismiss it. We had to work very hard to convince a number of Conservative members of Parliament to allow the finance committee to study this question, and I am delighted that my colleague, the finance critic for the Liberal Party, has been able to persuade people that this is something that the committee needs to study.

However, we need to go even further in looking at these practical measures. We want the government to roll back the increase in employment insurance premiums, a tax that is regressive, that has a greater impact on lower and middle income people than it does on those who are better off. We want to end the clawback because, again, the clawback is going to have a negative effect on people on lower incomes and not help them in the least.

We want to make sure that tax credits, such as the family caregiver tax credit, can actually be taken up by people who have no taxable income. We want to make it refundable. It does not make sense to say that this is not going to be available to low-income people who are in fact going forward and taking care of their mother, father or someone else in their family who is disabled, that it is going to be available to people who have a taxable income but not available to people who do not.

Also, we want to make sure we make the registered disability savings plan available to sufferers of chronic diseases, because that is what it was intended to do.

Finally, we want to remove interest charges from the federal portion of student loans, because right now the federal government is actually making money on student loans, and we know that student debt is in fact an ever-increasing issue.

Before I proceed further, I just want to make it clear that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Cape Breton—Canso, who has been sitting here with a great deal of anxiety and concern that I might take up the full 20 minutes rather than just the time I agreed to as my share.

● (1020)

[*Translation*]

This is an important issue as it concerns our current economy. Globalization has created extraordinary possibilities for Canada. Our country is rich in natural resources. Our education system compares favourably with that of other countries. Our country has great advantages, but, at the same time, we must recognize that inequality has continued to grow over the past five years, and the past five years have been just as difficult as the 1990s.

I do not believe that this is really a partisan issue. The government could say that we had problems in the 1990s and that the Liberals have nothing to say about that. But we have to admit that during recessions and periods of government cutbacks, the government has the complex task of ensuring that inequality does not get worse. Quite frankly, this government does not want to take on that responsibility. It does not want to deal with this problem and even denies that there is a problem.

However, there is no doubt that it is a problem because we see that well-paid jobs continue to disappear and are being replaced by jobs that are lower paying, short-term and part-time, and do not have the same benefits.

[*English*]

Mr. Speaker, this is my first opportunity to congratulate you on your elevation as the Deputy Speaker of the House. You and I both remember the days in Windsor when we saw the transformation of an economy, which had powerful trade unions, which had good well-paying jobs, which performed important work in manufacturing, where members had pensions that they were assured would be there for them when they retired. Yes, frankly, they were good times. People were well off, people were able to buy cottages and take care of their kids. Those years are definitely not with us any more.

We are now in a time when workers are being asked to take further cuts and further drops in benefits, when a defined benefit is becoming very much the exception rather than the case, where we understand that there are greater and greater inequalities in how we are able to face life together.

There are a couple of false routes, as the Governor of the Bank of Canada said. Class warfare is a false exit. Trying to pretend we can stop the world and get off is a false exit. Pretending that we can somehow hold back all the forces of globalization is a false exit. However so is denial, pretending that if we continue to prosper as a country then obviously everyone will be able to share automatically in this prosperity.

Business of Supply

President Kennedy said in the 1960s at the very height of the period I was describing, when things seemed to be all in balance, that the rising tide will lift all boats. Now we are in a situation where the rising tide lifts some yachts, some very big boats, but it does not lift a lot of other boats. That means that government policy has to take the steps that are necessary to increase equality, to increase real opportunity and to understand that prosperity, social justice and sustainability are not necessarily enemies, are not necessarily at war with one another, but need to be brought together.

However, in order for that to happen, it will take deliberate, thoughtful, intelligent government policy. Some might say the steps we are proposing today are not radical enough. I would say they are very practical. They involve saying that we want the employment insurance premiums hike to stop at a time when we are in recession, at a time when people are hurting. We are saying that tax credits should be refundable. That is to say that if people have no taxable income, they should still be able to get the credits. We are saying that for students—particularly when we see youth unemployment on the rise the way it is today, up to 15%—it is really unconscionable that the Government of Canada would be making money off the loans we are giving to students in order to allow them to go to college and university.

This is why this is in fact the issue of our time. We cannot assume that prosperity will be fairly shared and we cannot take prosperity itself for granted. We have to avoid the mistakes of the extreme right and the extreme left, and we have to come up with practical proposals that will make a difference to ordinary people and ensure that our prosperity is truly, fairly, deeply and widely shared.

•(1025)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is my first opportunity to congratulate you on your election as Deputy Speaker of the House.

My question for the member for Toronto Centre is quite simple. The Liberal Party is proposing five new initiatives: the rollback of EI premium increases, the rollback of the EI clawback, making the family caregiver tax credit refundable, making the RDSP available to a broader group of people and removing interest costs for the federal portion of student loans.

Could the member tell the House how much each of these five items would cost the federal treasury?

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, a broader question is this. What is the cost of not doing it? The member will say it would increase government debt. I would say to the hon. member that refusing or failing to do these things simply passes that debt on to consumers who are not in a position to bear that debt.

Consumer debt, personal debt, the debt of ordinary families is higher today than it has ever been in the entire history of Canada. People are only able to afford this debt because of very low interest rates. It is not right that this debt be passed on to each individual. It is better that we share the responsibility we have to make sure that economic prosperity does not come at the expense of ordinary people.

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for an excellent speech that set out some of the fundamentals that underlie this motion. The five specific asks in

the motion were well underpinned by a philosophy of why inequality is a problem.

I would simply like to ask the hon. leader of the Liberal Party how he thinks about income and equality and its relationship to the health of our democracy at the moment. Would he agree that the further we see income inequality building up in this country, the less engagement of citizens there is with our political system and the more we will see democracy itself suffering from this fact?

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member makes an excellent point. I am sure he will not be surprised to hear me say that.

I was very encouraged by the words of the Governor of the Bank of Canada, because Mr. Carney is a very thoughtful individual, an exceptional public servant of Canada. He has had a chance to see the impact that this issue is having, not only in our country but in the United States and every industrialized country.

I do not think we can possibly explain the declining rates of participation in elections, the sense of cynicism and the sense of frustration that many citizens are expressing about our democratic life, precisely because they feel they are working harder, they are getting less for it, they are doing a little less well than they would like to be able to do, and they are very concerned about what will happen to them and what will happen to their families as they see their debt levels growing. They have this preoccupation now with how they are going to do and how they are going to survive in this very difficult situation.

Yes, it has a corrosive impact on our democratic life. I do not think there is any question about that.

•(1030)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to congratulate our leader on his excellent speech. Much greater emphasis needs to be put on the consequences of these inequities.

He spoke about the weakening of our institutions and the cynicism toward our democratic system. There are people who do not believe in anything anymore because of these inequities. I would like our colleague to explain in his own words why it is important to address these inequities.

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, let us look at this issue from both a personal and a historical point of view. It is important to recognize that our country—like the United States, Europe and other countries—is being confronted with a major challenge. There was an agreement made in the years following the Second World War: if people worked hard and made an effort, then they would get a pension and could avoid certain problems if they became ill, and life would be good for everyone. This was not complete equality because it was recognized that everyone's circumstances were different, but there was still a spirit of solidarity.

This spirit of solidarity is disappearing in our economy. That is the big problem that we have. The current lack of solidarity means that people are not seeing a place for justice or opportunity in our economy.

Business of Supply

The government, whether at the provincial or federal level, has a shared responsibility to use every means possible to make the economy fairer. That is the government's job. We believe that this is a common, fundamental task, and we are going to continue to work to ensure that this is what happens in the future.

[English]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Toronto Centre for being so generous in sharing his time with me on this particular issue. I will speak specifically about the changes to the EI provisions for those working while on claim.

In his comments, our leader alluded to the over-arching campaign by the Conservative government to misinform, misdirect and mislead Canadians on a variety of issues. Pick a topic and we can see the misinformation coming from the government. We certainly saw it during the opening week in the House of Commons. The Conservatives continue to talk about their record on the economy and set themselves up as great stewards of the economy. Let us look at that alone.

Since 2006, the Conservative government has added \$100 billion to the national debt. I cannot see any reason to take a bow for that. When the government came into office, just over a million Canadians were unemployed. Right now, there are just shy of 1.5 million Canadians unemployed. There is no reason to take a bow on that. The unemployment rate went from just about 6.5% to just shy of 7.5%.

The Conservatives inherited a \$14 billion surplus from the Liberal government and they turned it into a \$55 billion deficit. That is a record in the history of this country, and it is the kind of stewardship that we have seen from the Conservatives, yet they continue to say they are great stewards of the economy. That is false and leads to what am going to say today.

The media is exposing the government for its misdirection and misinformation in misleading Canadians. We had the opportunity to read Allan Gregg's piece from last week. There were also comments by John Ibbitson, Andrew Coyne and Lawrence Martin. In particular, Andrew Coyne was very strong in his column last weekend when he said, "Conservatives did not invent dumb, dishonest, attack dog politics—though they may have perfected it". He talked about lies and personal attacks, saying that "[t]he Conservatives are better at it: more disciplined, more relentless, less daunted by shame".

That is where the problem lies with the working while on claim provision. We have heard the misinformation on that by the minister and the Prime Minister has simply rehashed the talking points.

Let us talk about the history of the working while on claim provision. In 2005 the Liberal government put forward a measure to take a disincentive out of the working while on claim program. People were allowed to make 40% of their EI benefit. The math is simple. If someone's EI benefit was \$200, that person was able to earn \$80 and keep that \$80. That is how basic it is: 40% of earnings were retained. Under the new provision, a clawback begins on the first dollar. The \$80 that the person made would be clawed back and he or she would clear \$240 rather than \$280. If that person is counting on \$280 for their household income for that week, that is an

attack on the most vulnerable and poorest in this country. That is what the Conservative government is doing.

The minister has shown no understanding and no appreciation for the files. If the government were going to make this change, the minister had every opportunity to let it be known to members of the House and Canadians. There was not a word in the budget document about cancelling allowable earnings. There was not a word about changing the provision on how to determine the benefit rate and the clawback.

The minister made a big announcement on May 24 about the change in the pilot project. She said nothing about cancelling the provision. She made another speech on August 2 and sent a letter to EI recipients in July where she underlined that "you [the claimant] will always benefit from accepting work". That is not the truth.

• (1035)

The examples that Service Canada has on its website now are unbelievable. The department puts the high end in, and this is another inequality. Here are two examples from its website.

Mario finds a part-time job making \$500 a week, about \$30,000 a year, which is not a bad part-time job. Or there is Anna, who is very lucky to find a part-time job and make \$790 a week, which is almost \$40,000 a year. In my riding, that is a career.

Service Canada has two groups: the haves and the have-mores. The Conservative government does not care about those Canadians out there who are having trouble finding work, the 7.5% of the population who are unemployed.

Anyone making under \$300 a week over and above their EI benefits is going to feel the impact of these changes and clawbacks. What really drives it home is that according to Statistics Canada, the median weekly income of part-time wage earners is \$226. Therefore, anyone under that income is going to feel a harsh negative impact from the changes, and certainly quite a few over that median amount will also be impacted.

In the agricultural sector, for which we have a lot of western members here, the median income for part-time work is \$160 a week. Food and accommodation is about \$180 a week. These people are being hard pressed by the actions of the Conservative government.

I am sure that all members have received correspondence on this issue. I have a letter from a lady who has allowed me to discuss it.

Business of Supply

Rhoda is off on maternity leave. She has a nine-month-old daughter. When she went on maternity leave she was told that she would be able to make \$143 a week to supplement her income, and so she did her yearly financial plan around that. Then the rule changes came, and she said that the only notice she received was a confusing letter in July. Now she grosses \$143, but after deductions that is down to about \$115, and then comes the \$71 in clawback provisions. From \$143, she ends up with \$44. That is the real math of these changes and the impact they are having on Canadian households.

Again, I can cite the examples used by the minister and the Prime Minister. Yesterday in the House, when our leader asked what the government was doing for the less fortunate and low-income families, the Minister of Foreign Affairs got up and read off a whole list and mentioned, as part of that list, that the working-while-on-claim provisions were helping low-income families. Nothing could be further from the truth. Those provisions are actually hurting the most vulnerable.

This is what really gets my goat and gets me thinking: Where are the members from rural communities out there? Where are the members who represent ridings where seasonal work and seasonal industries generate regional economies? Why are they not speaking up? Where are the guys from Atlantic Canada? Why are they not speaking up on behalf of their constituents? Why are they not telling the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development that this is wrong, that it has to be changed and that these clawbacks have to be taken out?

The minister should do this now for the most vulnerable. Let us see them get off their duffs over there and do something for the people of this country.

● (1040)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat disappointed by the tone of the member's statement. I think all members of the House come to this place with the intent of helping people.

The member was part of a government that ran a massive EI surplus. That was a tax on workers and small business. In fact, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business consistently, in every single one of its publications, has pointed out how the government was siphoning money from EI and putting it into general revenues. The member cannot deny that fact.

Specifically with respect to the program he has mentioned, he is citing a specific example where the difference appears not to be working out in favour of the worker, but in many cases it does. What we need to understand is that people are always better off by participating in the workforce, whether in a part-time or full-time job. Part-time jobs can often lead to full-time jobs and full-time jobs can lead to better full-time jobs. This is a fact of the workforce. People are simply happier and feel more productive when they are working.

I looked at the incentives and the clawback that the member talks about. One thing the Liberals never did was to allow people to work while they were on EI. They had a 100% clawback. Perhaps the member would like to speak about that.

● (1045)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the advice on setting the tone in the House by the member. It is like leaving the dogs in charge of the meat.

However, this is the example. He stood there and said that every dollar was clawed back dollar for dollar. That is what I am talking about. The Conservatives cannot fix the problem because they either do not know there is a problem or they will not admit there is a problem. Under the old program, claimants were allowed to make 40% of their EI benefit. If they made \$200 as an EI benefit and worked to make an additional \$80, they were able to keep that \$80. Under this new system, they lose 50% on the dollar right from the first dollar, so they only keep \$40 of that \$80.

I am asking someone over there on the front bench to hire a grade 10 math student to figure it out and walk them through it because Canadians are being hurt as his government will not stray from its stupid talking points.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his great speech, not because he is a Liberal but because he is from Cape Breton. I have to give him some credit for having some smart family members.

The issue of inequality has to be looked at in a much larger perspective than the fact we are in a period of global economic crisis. However, within the crisis we see the Conservative Party using it to its advantage to go after its enemies. My colleague talked about Conservatives seeing only the haves and the have-mores, but it is really about their buddies and their enemies. Those people they see as not being their buddies, they have been systematically undermining, including for example unions and public sector workers, the backbone of the 20th century middle class. There has been a relentless attack on them. They have been called lazy and overpaid, and the government has talked about union bosses, and has been undermining their right to a pension. This was the infrastructure that created the middle class that allowed our grandparents' generation to move up and to get an education.

The Liberals say they are not into this class war, but it is clear that a war is being declared on working people and on the rights of people. What does my hon. colleague think we need to do about it in the House?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, that is a fair question. I get a bit excited on some of these issues and it would be best to deal with the issues, but there is this overarching problem that we have seen in the House, in this Parliament, with the majority Conservative government that has handcuffed and shackled our ability as members of Parliament to deal with some of these important issues.

It would have been best if the human resources committee had been able to look at these changes and their impacts on all Canadians, but that is not going to happen under this government. I know that is a great disservice. It is regrettable, but it is a fact of life.

Business of Supply

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. From the last discussion, it is obvious that government members do not know how the current or old system worked. I have a paper here by the Library of Parliament that is called "Case studies for the new pilot project, working while on claim", which explains that. I wonder if I could have unanimous consent to table that report done by independent and non-partisan researchers so that government members would have the benefit of seeing how the system really works.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to table this document?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: There is no consent.

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Parliament for Calgary Northeast.

I would like to thank the member for Toronto Centre for bringing forward this motion to the floor of the House today because it provides an excellent opportunity to highlight the record of our government on combatting poverty.

It is an inconvenient truth for the members of the third party that poverty has never been lower in Canada than it has been under a Conservative government. Thanks to the strong leadership of our Prime Minister, our government has acted where the Liberals only talked. In 1996, the poverty rate reached the highest level ever in over 40 years in Canada at 15.2%. In 2010, three million Canadians or only 9% of Canada's population lived in poverty. While this number is still too high, we are continuing to act to reduce it. This number represents the lowest percentage in Canada's history and is 32% lower than under the Liberal government. To put this in context, this is 1.3 million Canadians who, under our Conservative government, were lifted out of poverty.

In 1996, at the peak of poverty in the last 40 years, 16.2% of women were considered to be low income. In 2010, I am pleased to report that the poverty rate among women in Canada dropped to all-time low of 9.3%, a 57% decrease in poverty. When the Liberals took power in 1993, poverty rates were 2.1% higher for women than for men and in 2000, almost a decade later, poverty rates were still 2.1% higher for women than for men. In 2009, under our Conservative government, that gap was erased as women found greater income security under our government.

Another hard truth for the Liberals is something that I am very passionate about. In 2006, children experienced a higher rate of poverty than adults in Canada. Since 2006 when we formed government, for the first time in Canadian history, children had a lower poverty rate than adults. In 1996 under the previous Liberal government, 18.4% of Canadian children lived in poverty, which was 3.4% higher than working age Canadians. In 2010, this number was cut in half, with 8.2% of children, unfortunately, still living in poverty, a rate which is 1.9% lower than working age Canadians.

The pattern is very clear. Under the Liberals, there was more child poverty in Canada than under our current government. This is because while the Liberals spent over a decade talking about providing support for Canadian families, they did not deliver. Our government, in the first year, brought in the universal child care benefit, which provided direct financial support to Canadian families, bringing 24,000 families out of poverty.

In addition to introducing the child tax credit, we have improved the child tax benefit and the national child benefit supplement. The Canada child tax benefit helps Canadian families with the costs of raising their children. Low-income families also receive a national child benefit supplement. As a result, low-income families benefit from a tax-free monthly benefit for each child under the age of 18, up to an annual maximum. All of these changes have met with opposition from the parties across the aisle as they voted again and again against helping these Canadian families.

While on the topic of supporting families, I was a little surprised to see that the Liberals chose to highlight the family caregiver tax credit because it was the Liberals who voted against the creation of this tax credit in the first place. Because of the actions of our government, the typical Canadian family pays \$3,100 less each year in taxes than under the previous Liberal government. However, tax cuts and direct financial support can only go so far. We have been clear that the best way to fight poverty is to connect Canadians with jobs.

● (1050)

[Translation]

We know that people who remain active on the job market are likely to find a permanent job more quickly. A permanent job is what provides stability and helps improve living conditions.

[English]

Even in challenging economic times, the leadership of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance has created economic opportunities for Canadians. As I have pointed out in the House several times, we have had the strongest employment record among the G7. Canada is the envy of our economic peers, with over 770,000 net new jobs.

We are dealing with the reality of an aging population, coupled with robust economic growth in our natural resources industry, creating labour shortages in several regions of the country. These shortages are already acute in many regions and they will only continue to increase. According to Statistics Canada, more than a quarter of a million jobs were unfilled last spring. Our government's goal is to get as many Canadians working as possible and if they lose their jobs, we want them to return to work as quickly as possible.

Over the last several months, our government has announced new common sense measures to ensure that EI is fair, flexible and responsive to the needs of Canadians. EI is designed to be a form of temporary income support while claimants actively look for a job. It is certainly not intended to discourage people from trying to get back into the job market.

It has been found in study after study that a person can find a permanent job more rapidly if they continue to be active in the labour market by looking for work or by working, even part time or casually. The working while on claim pilot promotes workforce attachment by encouraging claimants to accept available work while receiving EI benefits and earning some additional income while on claim. This applies to receiving regular benefits, fishing, parental and compassionate care benefits.

This is a pilot project. This is not a permanent change but an opportunity to test whether we can encourage unemployed Canadians to work while they are on claim. These changes are about empowering unemployed workers and helping them get back into the workforce. We believe that most Canadians would rather have a permanent job than spend longer periods of time on employment insurance.

Our government has also made historic investments in skills and training for Canadians. Sadly, the Liberal record has been to vote in opposition to all of these job creation initiatives. These include the youth employment strategy, the EI hiring credit, the apprenticeship incentives, targeted initiatives for older workers and the tool tax credit.

While we are on the topic of education, it should be noted that the default rates on student loans have dropped to the lowest levels ever. This is because our government in 2009 created the repayment assistance plan. Through this program we provide students the flexibility they need to manage their debt by paying back what they can reasonably afford.

I also want to take a moment, while we are talking about education, to correct the member for Toronto Centre. The government does not make a profit from student loan interest rates. Student loans are funded through government bonds, and the interest rate is set on a yearly basis on a break-even ratio.

In addition to this, with respect to supporting students, we announced on January 1 of this year that part-time students will no longer actually pay interest on loans and grants, and in budget 2011, we provided loan forgiveness for students, particularly those who are seeking new family physician residencies or nursing positions in remote areas. Finally, we have extended the grants program for students. Over 290,000 students benefit from this program, almost double what it was under the Liberals.

In conclusion, as I demonstrated earlier, poverty levels have been reduced to historic lows under our government. Default rates on student loans have dropped to the lowest levels ever under any government. The simple truth is that Canadians are better off with a strong, stable, majority Conservative government.

I encourage the member of Parliament for Toronto Centre to admit that his party was wrong and agree that there should be some support for our action plan. I encourage all members of the House to support the tangible results of this government and to vote against this motion in the House of Commons.

●(1055)

[Translation]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoulu, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague's speech and I thank her for it.

Business of Supply

However, aside from parading a whole series of very limited one-offs, a so-called “clientelistic” approach—which is this government's trademark—she has not brought much to this debate.

I will focus on employment insurance. I am not embarrassed to say that, a few months before I was elected, I was receiving employment insurance after a number of my contracts ended and while I was waiting for a new one. I must say that at that time, the benefits I was receiving were very good, since I had left an excellent job at the end of my last contract.

It is no secret that the new measures adopted by the government will drastically restrict opportunities for workers in any income category and, obviously, primarily those who have very low incomes, which, I repeat, was not my case.

I know from talking with the public and I remember very well that one of the biggest challenges of being between jobs is being able to qualify for a new job. A person has to be able to eat properly, buy new clothes, groom themselves and take care of themselves to be able to be ready to meet a potential employer.

In light of the measures she presented, how does the member expect to give unemployed workers a chance to integrate into the working world?

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, the track record for this government is very clear. We have created 770,000 net new jobs since the downturn in the recession in July 2009.

The record for the opposition is also very clear, whether it be the NDP or the Liberals. Opposition members have voted against every initiative put forward by this government to help those individuals who are unemployed, whether that be the targeted initiative for older workers, the EI hiring tax credit, or making sure there were apprenticeship grants and initiatives available to young Canadians.

The opposition's track record is very clear. It voted against these.

We are about creating jobs. The opposition is not.

●(1100)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my friend and colleague cited a couple of stats from 1993, so we will have a little trip back to 1993 and put those stats into some kind of context.

When the Liberal government came to power in 1993, it was taking over from the Brian Mulroney Conservative government. Interest rates were 12.5%, inflation was double digits, the unemployment rate was 12.5%, the stand-alone EI fund had been bankrupted and it was the Auditor General who made the Liberal government put the EI fund into general revenue so it could administer it.

Business of Supply

I know the member is a smart person. She has been referred to as a brilliant surgeon. I sit with her on committee and she is a quick study, so does the member's party not understand the math or is it wilfully not wanting to help those low-income earners? It is either the math or just no will to help those low-income earners.

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, we do have some interesting comments in debate with respect to committee, so I appreciate the member opposite's question.

To be clear, there have been a number of initiatives, as I just mentioned, that this government has moved forward on to ensure that individuals who are unemployed have an opportunity to reattach themselves to the workforce. The best way to fight poverty is to ensure an individual has a job. The initiatives that this government has taken in economic action plans 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 have all acted to help Canadians find jobs. Whether it be the targeted initiative for older workers, helmets to hard hats, or apprenticeship grants, these are all opportunities for Canadians to find employment and that is exactly where we are going to be focused.

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today in the House to talk about the great work our Conservative government has been doing to support Canadian families across Canada.

As a government, we have taken many measures to help families, and in particular, low-income families, and have made significant gains in reducing poverty in Canada.

The numbers are quite staggering. In 1996 the poverty rate was 15.2% under the Liberals. In 2010, under the Conservative government, it was 9%. Clearly, we are doing something right when we have achieved the lowest percentage of poverty in Canadian history.

Another hard truth for the Liberals is that before 2006 children experienced a higher rate of poverty than adults in Canada. After 2006, when we formed government, for the first time in history, children had a lower poverty rate than adults.

In 1996, under the Liberals, 18.4% of children lived in poverty. In 2010 this number was cut in half, with 8.2% of children considered to be living in poverty, a rate which is 1.9% lower than working age Canadians. Since 2006, there are 225,000 less children in poverty than under the Liberals.

As we all know, the only way to permanently solve poverty is to create jobs and economic growth.

Our government has encouraged private sector sustained through various policy initiatives.

First, we encouraged employers to create jobs by investing in programs, to provide small and medium-sized businesses with the workforce they need to promote growth and contribute to our country's economic stability. We have taken steps to ensure that Canadians have the skills and training required to take advantage of the job opportunities they need to achieve self-sufficiency.

One of the ways we do this is by investing significant funds annually in labour market and labour market development agreements with the provinces and territories, which help train over 750,000 each year.

We have a number of other initiatives that pave the way for diverse groups of Canadians to participate in the economy.

We are reaching out to youth through our youth employment strategy, skills link, career focus and Canada summer jobs and through apprenticeship grants. In fact, in Canada's economic action plan 2012, we announced a significant increase in the amount we would invest in the youth employment strategy over the next two years. This investment will connect to young Canadians with jobs that are in high demand by helping them develop the skills and gain the experience they need.

We are reaching out to the men and women who have lost their jobs due to the recent economic downturn. We are giving them a hand up, not a handout, and offering to retrain them for the jobs of tomorrow.

As our economy emerges from the recession, our next challenge will be to address the growing skills and labour shortage that is emerging in parts of our country.

Work-sharing has been a great success. I am happy to say that fewer and fewer companies need to take advantage of it. Through this program, employers were able to keep their employees on the job, while they recovered from the economic downturn.

One of the items I am most excited about is the progress our government has made in speeding up the recognition of foreign credentials. Over the past several years, our government has been funding national organizations to develop standards for credential recognition, as well as programs to evaluate credentials more quickly.

The government has also introduced a number of initiatives to help aboriginal Canadians succeed in the labour force. Our ASETS program is helping between 14,000 and 16,000 aboriginals connect with jobs across the country.

Our Conservative government believes that persons with disabilities should have the same opportunities as other Canadians to obtain and maintain employment or to become self-employed. That is why we are improving accessibility to the workplace for people with disabilities by supporting training and skills development funded through the opportunities fund.

● (1105)

Under our economic action plan, the government has dedicated an unprecedented amount to help Canadian workers over the last two years. Sadly, we have witnessed the parties across the way vote against every one of these measures.

There are 770,000 more Canadians who are working today than when the recession ended. As a result, Canada boasts the strongest rate of employment growth among the G7 countries. Canada remains a pillar of stability in an increasingly fragile global economy.

Because of the tax breaks we provide to families, the average family now pays \$3,100 less each year in taxes compared to when the Liberals were in power.

Business of Supply

We can measure the effects that our policies have had on reducing child poverty. As I stated earlier, there are 225,000 fewer children in poverty than when we took office in 2006. That is the Conservative record on helping the most vulnerable in our society.

The working income tax benefit supplements the earnings of low-income families. This one initiative alone was expected to help 1.5 million Canadians and working families across the country in 2011. Our government brought in the universal child care benefit, which provides all families with up to \$1,200 per year per child for each child under the age of six to help cover their child care costs.

We have ensured that single-parent families are able to transfer their universal child care benefit amount to a dependant for tax purposes, ensuring in most cases that this money is not taxed.

In addition to introducing the child tax credit, we have improved the Canada child tax benefit and the national child benefit supplement. The Canada child tax benefit helps Canadian families with the cost of raising their children. Low-income families also receive a national child benefit supplement. As a result, low-income families benefit from a tax-free monthly benefit for each child under the age of 18, up to an annual maximum.

Low to middle-income families that have children with disabilities can expect additional help. Our government has also brought in measures to allow parents a choice in how savings are set aside for the future of their children. Choices and flexibility are the keys for families as costs related to coping with a disability can prevent families from contributing on a regular basis to a savings plan.

Our Conservative government has repeatedly shown its commitment to supporting families through significant EI measures as well. Foster parents now have access to parental benefits once a child has been placed with them for the purpose of adoption, instead of waiting until the legal proceedings were complete.

Eligibility to the compassionate care benefit has been extended to include additional family members and others considered as family by the person who is gravely ill.

Self-employed persons are now able to opt in to the EI program to receive maternity, parental, sickness and compassionate care benefits.

As for military families, they now have improved access to parental benefits to ensure that a tour of duty overseas does not deprive them of the opportunity to bond with their newborn child.

In order to always better support Canadian families, the government has moved forward with the introduction of the helping Canadian families in need bill, which would create a new EI special benefit for parents of critically ill children and flexibility of access to sickness benefits for parents who become ill while receiving EI parental benefits.

The government also recognizes that many Canadian families are taking on caregiving responsibility for dependent relatives. In 2009 we created the family caregiver tax credit to provide tax relief to caregivers of the relatives, be they aging parents, minor children, spouses or common-law parents. Sadly, the Liberal Party voted against creating this much-needed tax credit.

Our government will continue to remain focused on jobs, growth and economic prosperity. Unlike the opposition, we will not put forward reckless economic policies such as a job-killing carbon tax that would raise the price of everything.

We reject the Liberal record of much talk and no action. Our economic action plan is working to reduce poverty in Canada. We invite all members to support the government in achieving historic successes in reducing poverty in Canada. That is why our government will not be supporting the opposition motion.

• (1110)

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with only one job available for every five unemployed workers in our country and with only four out of ten unemployed workers getting EI benefits, we have seen that unemployment is persistently high, it is not coming down and yet the government continues the practice of the previous Liberal government in using EI funds to balance budgets, at the same time restricting access to EI.

Could the member explain why his government is increasing inequality by denying workers access to basic EI benefits for which they have already paid?

Mr. Devinder Shory: Mr. Speaker, let us look at the facts. While the opposition talks, we are acting to help Canadians families. Over 770,000 new jobs have been created since the end of the recession. Also, this government has made unprecedented investment in skills training, post-secondary education and student financial assistance to provide Canadians with skills they need today and in the future.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I accept the invitation of my hon. colleague to look at the facts. I am looking at the low income cutoff published by Statistics Canada, which peaked in about 1996, something like 16% of persons, and went down to about 10% by the time the Conservative government took over in 2006. It has gone down a little since then, but most of the decrease occurred after a few years of a Liberal government.

I would like to contest the government speakers who have criticized the Liberal record. In fact, the decrease in poverty that we have seen in Canada has come about during a Liberal government. The speakers on the Conservative side are really distorting the facts and are not looking at them. In addition, they are ignoring that this debate is about income inequality. We should be looking at the Gini coefficient, which is a numerical measure of income inequality. It is a measure of how much the tide is raising just the yachts and not everyone else's boats.

I would like my hon. colleague to retract his criticism of the Liberal government because it is not true.

Business of Supply

•(1115)

Mr. Devinder Shory: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that since 2003, there are 225,000 fewer children in poverty if we compare it with the Liberals. We enhanced the national child tax benefit, which unfortunately the Liberal Party and the member voted against. The low income rate for female children under the age of 18 in lone parent families has dropped from 56% under the Liberals in 1996 to 21.8% in 2010, and the member and his party voted against it.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I, too, would like to offer you congratulations on your new role.

We have a look at the facts, so I would like to look at the overall rate of low-income earners that has declined significantly under our government. It is down from 15.2% in 1996 to 9% in 2010.

When the leader of the Liberal Party gave his speech and talked about many of the measures, he was asked a very specific question about the costs. He really had no answer.

Would my hon. colleague talk about that and the fact that many of the things the Liberals talk about are measures that we have introduced and the Liberals have voted against them, such as the family caregiver tax credit?

Mr. Devinder Shory: Mr. Speaker, we need to realize the facts. The reality is that the Liberals' policy has been tax and spend. The fact is that an average family now pays over \$3,000 less in taxes than when the Liberals were in power and the incidence of poverty is at an historic low. The unfortunate part is that all members of the Liberal Party voted against all of the measures this government took.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to this motion on income inequality. I will splitting my time with my colleague, the hon. member for Hochelaga.

Inequality is another inconvenient truth of our era. Its growth is every bit as unsustainable for our communities, businesses and economy as climate change. If we cannot reduce it, it will hobble growth and opportunity for the next generation.

We cannot afford to misuse our economic strengths in this way. Canada is among the most fortunate of nations, with the 10th largest economy in the world. We have the resources, natural, economic and financial, to create the kind of society that we want. We can afford to share our prosperity. The good news is that shared prosperity leads to more prosperity. Greater equality is not a trade-off but an investment into our future.

Income inequality remains one of the most serious challenges our country faces today and has been on the rise in Canada for the past 20 years. We in the NDP welcome all efforts to reduce, not accelerate, income inequality. We are glad that the Liberals are finally on board and we appreciate the suggestions in this motion.

However, what needs to be done is not just embroidering the cloth but repairing the fraying fabric of our society.

Sadly, the Liberals presided over increased income inequality while they were in power during the 1990s and 2000s and they have consistently supported Conservative budgets that have led us down the wrong path.

We welcome this opportunity to spend today debating this motion. It is an important issue that gets far too little attention in the House and from the government.

Our former colleague, Tony Martin, has made reducing inequality his life's work, including when he was in the House, and we miss him.

•(1120)

[*Translation*]

Here are some facts. Most Canadians' real income has been stagnant for several years. Over a period of 33 years, average income rose by just 5.5%. According to the Conference Board of Canada, income inequality is increasing more rapidly in Canada than in the United States.

[*English*]

The Conference Board of Canada recently gave Canada a C grade for incoming inequality and ranked us 12 out of 17 peer countries. The OECD has noted that Canada's level of inequality is now above the OECD average.

Much of the increase in inequality is being driven by income gains by the top 1%. The richest 1% of Canadians saw their share of total income increase from 8.1% in 1980 to 13.3% in 2007. The richest 1% in Canada took home almost one-third of all growth in incomes between 1998 and 2007, at the expense and to the detriment of other income groups.

At the same time, unemployment and economic growth are highly divergent across this country. Over 43% of unemployed Canadians live in Ontario alone. This increase in inequality has serious implications for Canadian families.

Household debt has reached record highs, suppressing demand and hindering economic growth.

Lars Osberg at Dalhousie University argues that:

Over the 1981 to 2006 period, the life experience of most Canadian families changed—the “new normal” has been that entering cohorts of young workers earned less in real terms than their parents' generation did at a comparable age.

Our young people are also facing high unemployment. The unemployment rate for people aged 15 to 24 is more than double the national average at 14.8%. This means that there are 400,000 youth in Canada who are looking for work and cannot find it.

Women, aboriginal people, racialized communities and recent immigrants also suffer from disproportionate poverty relative to other Canadians. Such inequality has serious societal consequences.

A 2009 groundbreaking book on inequality by British scholars, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, empirically demonstrates that inequality, more than GNP, has a significant impact on a range of social indicators, including health outcomes such as average life expectancy and other measures of human development such as rates of literacy, teenage pregnancy or incarceration.

Business of Supply

This is not the legacy that we should be leaving to the next generation. However, rather than taking action to correct these imbalances, the government has chosen to pursue an austerity agenda that has only exacerbated them.

The first thing we should do is support Canada's middle-class, not attack it. We should not stand idly by when giant corporations cut half the pay of workers or the workers lose their jobs, as in the case at Caterpillar. We should not intervene in private sector collective bargaining to force lower wages than even the employer was prepared to offer at the bargaining table, such as at Canada Post and Air Canada. We should not happily ship value-added jobs out of the country to the U.S. or China by focusing on exports of bitumen rather than upgrading resources right here at home in Canada.

We need to raise the floor, not lower it, by increasing the low wage, low skill sector of the economy with temporary foreign workers and instead sanction employers who pay them less than Canadians doing the same work.

In an era of increasing inequality, the government's attack on OAS, GIS and employment insurance, along with reckless cuts to the services Canadians rely on, is only adding to the problem.

When the Liberal and Conservative governments plundered the EI fund of billions of dollars and then told unemployed Canadians that they would have to accept lower benefits, that was simply unacceptable.

The Conservative government continues to promote a "you must accept less" doctrine for the vast majority but a "the sky's the limit" approach for the high rollers.

• (1125)

[*Translation*]

Before the mid-1990s, Canada's tax benefit system stabilized inequality as effectively as systems in Nordic countries, offsetting over 70% of the increase in income inequality.

However, redistribution has become less effective since then. The OECD has noted that taxation and benefits now offset less than 40% of the increase in inequality.

The Conservatives put a lot of stock in the economic spinoff approach to wealth distribution, claiming that higher incomes for the rich will eventually trickle down to the rest of us.

However, tax cuts for big corporations and the wealthiest Canadians have resulted in growing income inequality, stagnant economic growth and a higher unemployment rate.

Income inequality is a serious problem with serious consequences, and Canadians want us to do something about it.

According to an EKOS poll, income inequality is Canadians' primary concern.

[*English*]

If we cannot reduce equality, it will hobble growth and opportunity for the next generation.

Instead of tilting the playing field increasingly to the advantage of the most powerful and affluent in our society, we need a government that takes a first "do no harm" approach.

Rather than eliminating the deficit even faster than promised so that the government can introduce new tax cuts that will benefit Canada's most affluent households, it needs to invest in the services and programs that Canadians want and need right now.

We need strong, balanced job creation right across Canada and a living wage, including for all contracts and procurements with the federal government.

Sadly, in Canada we have seen weak leadership that has turned its back on the daily struggles of most Canadians, but we can change that. Canadians can count on the New Democrats to work for a future where Canada is prosperous for all and where no one is left behind.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is very genuine in her desire to have a positive impact on the lives of Canadians. However, it is one thing to talk in platitudes about how we would achieve these things or what we would like to see but we need to see some ironclad measures put on the table as to how she would seek to achieve the lofty goals that she has set. I think we would all like to see higher wages in Canada. I think we would all like to see Canadians earning more, doing better and in a stronger personal financial situation but we also have the reality of the global financial difficulties that we are witnessing.

I would just like to see some concrete measures put on the table. What concrete proposals would my colleague and her party propose to achieve what she is suggesting?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, as I said very clearly in my speech, the first basic tenet should be "do no harm". Rather than the serious cuts the government has already made, which are impacting Canadians across the country, the cutting of services and taking people, who currently get more benefits, to a position of reduced or, in some cases, no EI benefits, we should stop doing that. We need to continue to invest in the services and programs that Canadians want and need.

Yes, we do need to deal with reducing the deficit but we do not need to be as aggressive and accelerate even the government's own measures and own timeframes for deficit reduction. We are seeing that is increasing inequality. Ultimately, if the government uses those gains to create new tax measures that benefit only the people at the top, it will increase inequality.

• (1130)

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after the famous announcements the Conservatives made in the spring on the clawbacks to EI recipients, we have seen many cases all through the summer and early fall.

Business of Supply

What I am seeing right now are a lot of seasonal employers, and not just seasonal employers but hospitals and schools that need seasonal help. They will find it very difficult to get part-time employees to come in for one day during winter hours. The clawback is not only a detriment to poorer people but it will be a detriment to industries and businesses that cannot get people to come in for that one day. What will happen next spring when these businesses are in jeopardy?

Will the hon. member for Parkdale—High Park vote against the clawback measurement in EI? Could she explain how it is hurting businesses or institutions in her riding?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, I know that in the member's riding and region of the country many seasonal workers are seriously affected by these changes. These changes disproportionately hurt those at the lower end of the income scale. Of course there are regions of Canada where there are more seasonal workers and, therefore, those regions are disproportionately affected.

The hon. member asked me directly about my riding of Parkdale—High Park. We also have people who work seasonally in the tourist industry and in the arts and cultural sector who do not get full-time full-year work. They, too, are negatively affected by these changes. The clawback seriously hurts far too many Canadians, especially those who can afford it least, those at the lowest end of the income scale.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Mark Carney, the Governor of the Bank of Canada, points out that there are \$580 billion of what he calls “dead money” sitting in the bank accounts of corporate Canada because there is no incentive for it to move it back into the economy. The government has failed to set up clear drivers to ensure investment and job training.

Given the fact that the government has made tax cuts across the board year after year with no planned investment of how that would be redirected into the economy, how does the member feel about the \$580 billion of dead money sitting in bank accounts which could actually kickstart the economy at this time?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, if companies feel economic insecurity, they will not be investing. It just shows the failure of the approach of the present government and the previous Liberal government to not tie any tax reductions to specific job creation, innovation or economic stimulus, and we are feeling the impact of that now. It is creating a sluggish economy. Unemployment remains high. We know we can do much better with measures that are tied to job creation. That is what an NDP government would do.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals' motion raises some points that are worth discussing. It is true that recent changes to employment insurance have hurt low-income workers. It is also true that non-refundable tax credits for caregivers cannot even be used by many people because their income is too low to take advantage of the tax deductions. And it is quite true that income inequality is growing in Canada. In fact, the gap in Canada is greater than in the United States. The Conservatives are rather silent about this, perhaps because they dare not admit that it is true. However, the changes called for in the Liberal motion barely scratch the surface of the problem. It is a good start, but we

need much more profound changes in our society, as my colleague mentioned earlier.

I could criticize the government for all its measures with which I disagree, but as a member of the NDP I want to do politics differently. As our friend Jack often said, we want to work together. Therefore, rather than blaming the Conservatives, I would like to suggest some things we could do to help the most disadvantaged, measures that are compassionate, but that would also benefit the country financially. That is something they should like.

The motion we are debating today talks about reducing income inequality between the richest and the poorest. Let us talk a little bit about the neediest of the needy, those who do not even have a roof over their heads.

A recent study by Stephen Gaetz entitled *The real cost of homelessness* asks an intriguing question: can we save money by doing the right thing? It seems that a number of studies in Canada and the United States show that investing in prevention costs less, in the end, than using a patchwork of emergency solutions. Furthermore, we would be acting very compassionately. For example, the homeless are more poorly nourished and more stressed, often are the victims of violence or accidents, and do not sleep as well. The homeless are three and a half times more likely to have asthma than an average person, four times more likely to have cancer and five times more likely to have heart disease. In addition, they are 20 times more likely to have epilepsy and 29 times more likely to contract hepatitis C.

According to Michael Shapcott, from the Wellesley Institute in Toronto, in 2007, the monthly cost of a hospital bed was \$10,900. Comparatively, the cost of a shelter bed was \$1,932. Even better, the cost of a social housing bed in Toronto, where rent is not the cheapest in Canada, was \$199.92. You do not have to be good at math to see that the best solution is rather obvious, in both economic and human terms.

A homeless person is also at a higher risk of ending up in prison. In fact, according to a study by Kellen and others in 2010, approximately one in five inmates was homeless at the time of being incarcerated. According to Statistics Canada, in 2008-09, the average yearly cost of incarceration for a male was \$106,583, and was \$203,061 for a female. I highly doubt that subsidized housing for one of these people, even including support workers, would have cost the government as much.

So yes, I agree with Mr. Gaetz: we can save money while still doing good. Secure, affordable, adapted, adequate and safe housing helps prevent a lot of problems. It is an intelligent way to effect profound changes in society, not only for the homeless, but also for everyone. Everyone should have the right to adequate housing without having to destroy themselves financially.

Business of Supply

Many families and individuals have a hard time making ends meet because they earn a pittance, because they are ill, because they are retired and living on a fixed income, because they are young and are having a hard time finding a first job, or because they are students.

• (1135)

It is mainly these people who see the gap between their incomes and those of the wealthy getting wider every year.

Yes, we must ensure that employment insurance is fair for everyone, including those who cannot find full-time work and who will lose out with the new clawback mechanism established by the Conservatives. By the way, the presumption that everyone can find full-time work is false.

At the museum where I worked for 19 years, there were only three guides who had full-time jobs because of the nature of the work. The other 17 worked part-time. Jobs are becoming increasingly precarious, particularly in seasonal industries such as tourism and education. Many workers in these industries are women or young people who have less chance of success from the outset.

Yes, we must also ensure that caregivers can benefit from tax credits, even and particularly those who do not make enough money during the year to be able to take advantage of tax deductions. Once again, many of the people in these circumstances are women. Nonetheless, I am going to say it again: we need to take things much further than this motion.

Why not make the housing renovation programs permanent rather than providing temporary programs that leave something to be desired? With doors and windows that do not leak, heating systems would use less energy, and people would have lower heating bills and more money to spend on other things. There would also be more jobs available in the area of renovation.

Why not renew the agreements between the CMHC and social housing projects for buildings that need to be renovated or for those that cannot continue to provide subsidized housing once their mortgage expires?

Why not allow housing co-operatives that are trying to find another source of funding to end their agreement with the CMHC before the set end date without extremely restrictive penalties? This would allow them to find the money they need to do major renovations that cannot wait and that they do not have the means to do given their existing agreement with the CMHC.

Why not invest a portion of the CMHC's profits in new social housing, in conjunction with the provinces and territories, of course? People wait years for social and community housing. In the meantime, all of the money they spend on rent, which costs them much more than 25% of their income, could be helping other sectors of the economy. That money could also help them avoid having to choose between buying food or paying the rent. In the end, it would be better for the government too.

Why not bring back the 19.5% tax rate for big corporations, a rate that is, after all, still lower than that in the United States and that would give the government the money it needs to offer services to those who need them most? That money could be reinvested in housing and the fight against poverty.

I should point out that the NDP has repeatedly asked the House to adopt a national anti-poverty strategy. Maybe it is time for that now. All of these suggestions would help reduce the gap that is widening at an alarming rate between rich and poor in Canada.

Yes, I will support the Liberal motion this evening, but the House should also support bills introduced by my NDP colleagues, such as Bill C-241 and Bill C-400, which would guarantee all Canadians the right to decent, affordable housing so that they do not have to do without other essentials.

I hope that the members of all parties will set aside partisanship and support these important bills when the time comes to vote on them in the House. Forward-thinking, human policies like these are the only way to tackle growing inequality in our society.

• (1140)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I really appreciated my colleague's speech. That is really how a speech should be done; you have to be able to suggest changes. We want people to have access to employment insurance, but we would much rather that they had well-paying jobs. That is our position.

The Liberals—this is their motion—are trying to defend employment insurance and low-income and seasonal workers who are affected by this government's policies. However, we must not forget that, under previous Liberal governments, we had a real surplus of money.

Could my colleague perhaps explain what happened to that surplus? And could she also explain why, under those previous Liberal governments and the current government, fewer people have access to employment insurance when they are in greater need of it?

• (1145)

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her kind comment.

Let us talk about the employment insurance fund: \$57 billion was taken from the fund in the past merely to pad the government coffers. The Conservatives and the Liberals were trying to balance their own budgets using money that was paid into the fund by workers and employers. The money in this fund does not belong to the government. Because they did this, we now have less money to pay people who need employment insurance benefits. No one likes receiving employment insurance, but there are some people who have no other choice.

What the Conservatives are proposing now is penalizing people who have lower salaries and those who cannot work full-time. In my opinion, the old method and the current method should be combined to ensure that people who are able to receive a higher salary benefit from the program, but also to ensure that people who do not benefit from the program can choose to combine the two programs in order to take advantage of the calculation that would be most beneficial to them.

Business of Supply

[English]

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, respectfully, I cannot understand how the NDP can speak against all the good changes our government has made to help Canadians get back to work. A fine example of that hypocrisy is the NDP's decision to vote against a ways and means motion to introduce a bill to support Canadian parents whose children are either murdered, missing, or critically ill.

Why does the member opposite refuse to vote to support these Canadian families most in need?

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I would not say that everything is bad in every bill, motion or budget proposed by the Conservatives. However, when we do not agree on certain things, when we find certain things so bad that we cannot vote in favour of them, then we will oppose them.

With the last budget, the Conservatives were always accusing us of opposing something or some bill, of voting against the poor, against the disadvantaged, against a lot of things, apparently.

Voting in favour of a budget is like voting in favour of a collective agreement. In a budget, there are things we agree with and other things we do not agree with. However, we must vote on the bill as a whole. Either we refuse it all and try to work on it or we accept it all. When we do not agree with an important part of a bill, we reject it.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I cannot hide how pleased I am to see you for the first time in the Chair.

First, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Hochelaga for her excellent speech, and I would like to ask her two questions.

In general, inequalities are increasing in Canada, faster than in the United States. During the same period, under Liberal and Conservative governments, the corporate tax rate dropped from 28% to 15% between 2000 and 2012. Canadians did not see their own personal income tax rate go down as much. The government no longer has this revenue to redistribute wealth and to offer social programs.

In addition, how can the Conservatives tell us today that an unemployed person will lose 50% of any income from a second job as of their very first hour of work? How can they say that this constitutes progress or help for the unemployed?

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I will answer the first question about the corporate tax rate. As I mentioned in my speech, increasing the rate to 19.5% is the right thing to do. Corporations would still be paying less than the U.S. rate. This would give us more room to manoeuvre to help the most disadvantaged.

As for the second question, I must say that I have forgotten what it was. But, in any event, I would not have had time to respond.

• (1150)

[English]

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in support of the Liberal motion

introduced by the leader of the Liberal Party. I will share my time with the member for Malpeque.

Just to refresh the memory of those who will be listening or those here in the House today, I will speak to the motion, which says:

That the House call on the government to take several simple and immediate actions to reduce the growing income inequality in Canada including: (a) a roll back of its recent Employment Insurance Premium hikes which inflict a higher relative burden on low to modest income workers; (b) ending the punitive new claw back of Employment Insurance benefits that are discouraging many Canadians from working while on claim; (c) making tax credits, such as the Family Caregiver Tax Credit, refundable so that low income Canadians are not excluded; (d) making the Registered Disability Savings Plan available to sufferers of chronic diseases such as Multiple Sclerosis; and (e) removing interest charges from the federal component of student loans.

Anyone listening to our concerns and those we have spelled out in our opposition day motion can clearly see that this is meant to address the income inequality in our country. We have been hearing from Canadians from coast to coast to coast who have been impacted by the changes that the Conservative government has implemented since it was elected. The irony in all of this is that when the government came to power there was a \$14 billion surplus and that surplus was squandered in the first year that the Conservatives were in power. Now all of a sudden, we see they are coming up with all these initiatives that are harmful to low- and middle-income Canadians.

It is a government that increased the deficit in its first couple of years. Even before there was a recession or it would admit to a recession, it increased the deficit by \$56 billion. What have the Conservatives done? In the six years they have been in power, they have increased the country's debt by \$100 billion. This does not make sense. Then we turn around and watch as the government gives large corporations tax breaks to the tune of a savings of \$6 billion annually, all at the same time as we see low- and middle-income people suffering at the hands of the government and the decisions it has taken.

I can cite examples where the new rules concerning the working while on claim project are having a detrimental impact on Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

It is not just in Atlantic Canada. As members know, my riding is in Newfoundland and Labrador but this impacts not only Atlantic Canadians. This impacts those who have to avail themselves of EI while on maternity leave or while giving compassionate care to sick relatives. This is not just about people who work in seasonal industries, although they are impacted too. This whole change to the employment insurance program, which came about without any consultation, is a serious issue.

Business of Supply

In fact, people tell us they got their cheque and it was less than what they were expecting and they had no knowledge of why that was the case. I have had people tell me that if the government is going to take 50¢ from the very first dollar they earn and they get half of what their paycheque should be, then they take into account all the expenses associated with going to work, whether child care, transportation costs or whatever those expenses may be, they wonder where the incentive is for them to take part-time work or to look for full-time work because the government is going to penalize them for doing so. It is not right. Unless meaningful action is taken, the gap between the rich and the poor in our country will continue to increase.

According to the Conference Board of Canada, an independent economic research organization, income inequality has increased over the last 20 years. We do not need the government making it even worse for low- and middle-income earners.

• (1155)

It is not just the issues that I spelled out as topics of our opposition day motion, but there are also the issues of fleet separation and owner-operated policies that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, although it would not say so, was contemplating getting rid of. Independent fishermen, who are not wealthy, really need these policies in place to continue to fish as independent fishermen and sell their product to whomever they can. However, if the government had done away with those policies, it would have meant that large corporations would have been able to fish the same product, and there is no way that the independent fishermen could compete with these large corporations.

This is what we see with the Conservative government. We see the focus continually on helping the wealthy get wealthier while we see low-income and middle earners being penalized.

People are getting discouraged. They do not know whether they should even complain about it because no one seems to be listening. This is why, as the Liberal opposition here in the House of Commons, we felt it was absolutely essential that we come forward with this motion today to try and impress upon the government how important it is to reconsider some of the policies that it has implemented.

We have asked the Minister of Human Resources to review some of these policies. However, it would appear from her responses to questions raised with respect to the working while on claim project that the government either does not understand the implications or refuses to acknowledge that this is happening. Maybe this is what they intended to do from the very beginning.

We say, "Where there is a will there is a way". We have said this time and time again in the House of Commons and Canadians have been writing to us to, please, get the message across. If the Conservatives are listening at all, not just to us but to Canadians who are being negatively impacted by this, and they are now aware of the negative impact this new policy is having on Canadians then they can change it. There is no harm in admitting that a mistake was made, especially if it would be to the benefit of Canadians.

There are so many measures that the government is taking that are totally unnecessary. One is increasing the number of MPs in the

House of Commons. When I think of an additional 30 members of Parliament with all the costs associated with that and then I hear from people in my riding who are having difficulty making ends meet, it just does not make sense.

We have to question the priorities of a government that cannot seem to relate to Canadians who are having difficulty with the pressures that are put on them on a daily basis with the increased cost of living, post-secondary education, raising a young family and mortgage rates. If the government cannot relate, and that would appear to be the situation with the present government, then we see the wealthy getting wealthier and the low- and middle-income earners making less.

My riding is predominantly a rural riding where people try to make ends meet. In a lot of cases, they are able to get seasonal work and they work very hard. They want to work full time, year in and year out, but if the work is not available they will do the seasonal work, which is also important because there are employers who have seasonal industries. If the people are not available to work in those industries then that becomes an issue. The industry suffers as do the individuals who cannot avail themselves of the jobs.

• (1200)

We have to change our focus. The Conservative government has to start thinking about those who really need support in our country and be there for them.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was in my colleague's riding this summer. I happened to locate my husband's relatives and we camped in that area.

I want to talk about employment insurance. We know that under her party's government, as well as governments preceding and following, there has been a decline in people being able to access employment insurance. We think this is to the detriment of workers and a direct result of the policies that those governments put in place.

On the Conservative side of the House we keep hearing about the 770,000 jobs that have been created, but what the government does not tell us is how many good-paying jobs have been lost and how many of these jobs have been taken over by temporary foreign workers. I am wondering if she shares the same concern, that the jobs being created are low-income and that some have been taken over by temporary foreign workers.

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, I am glad my hon. colleague was able to make it to Random—Burin—St. George's, which, in my opinion, happens to be the best riding in the country.

Having said that, I share her concern with respect to jobs. While the government talks about the thousands of jobs it has created, unfortunately, we are seeing high-paying jobs being cut, like scientists, for example. We hear the outcry from scientists all the time that there are no longer jobs available for them because the government does not want to hear facts. The government will hire people without regard to whether they are low- or middle-income earners and that is the problem this country is having.

Business of Supply

The Minister of Finance talked about the job cuts he was having to make and that the majority of them would be in the centre. Guess what? That is not the case. PSAC is saying that has not happened and, in fact, the majority of these jobs are being cut throughout the country. Once again, the rural areas of Canada are suffering while the centre continues to prosper.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am worried about next year. Over the last few months, we have heard from the people who are being clawed back and now we are hearing about businesses and institutions that are going to be in really bad shape because of what is going to happen with their employees who used to work for them all year and will now be working for them for a day. It is going to have an impact on fish plants, schools and hospitals.

My question to her is this. In her riding and province, is this going to have a detrimental impact on the institutions and businesses so that they go out of business or may not be able to function the following year without the people they used to employ?

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, my colleague can certainly relate to what is going on in his province just as I can relate to what is going on in mine.

We hear over and over from employers who operate seasonal businesses that the rules that have changed under the Conservative government are having a detrimental impact. If people are being forced to move away to work, that means seasonal businesses will not be able to find employees. That is a serious issue because the economic base for a lot of small communities is seasonal industries. People are going to be forced to move to Alberta where they can get full-time employment instead of being able to do what needs to be done from a seasonal industry perspective and then find other jobs to supplement that. Everyone wants to work. No one wants to be on employment insurance, and that is what we need to recognize.

We need to bear in mind that trying to accommodate people from all walks of life, who work in all types of industries, is what the government should be doing, instead of looking at it as either black or white.

• (1205)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it goes without saying that I certainly support the motion. The motion relates to inequality and so I will speak mainly on the new EI clawback rules that came into effect on August 5. As the leader of the Liberal Party, the member for Toronto Centre, said in his remarks, the government has taken steps that have in fact accelerated inequality. He outlined a number of areas.

I want to talk specifically about the EI changes and how they have really accelerated inequality. My colleague from Newfoundland and Labrador just talked about her riding. She said the wealthy are getting wealthier and the poor, poorer and that the gap is growing. Nothing shows it more starkly than these changes to the employment insurance system.

If a person is making over \$300 per week, then they are a little better off, but if they are making less than \$300 a week, they are very much worse off.

In my neck of the woods people are in the seasonal industries. We have tourism, fisheries and agriculture, all of them seasonal industries. A farmer may need someone for a day, so the person will only get a day's work, or in the fisheries doing mussels it may be for half a day or a day. A person on employment insurance is lucky if he or she can get more than a day, a day and a half or sometimes two days a week extra employment, because in all honesty, the jobs are just not there, but we need those people in the seasonal industry.

On these very provisions the government introduced, I question whether the minister understands her files according to the answers she has been giving on this issue. However, knowingly or unknowingly, the government has introduced a system that is good for those who are making fairly decent money and are able to get the additional work, but is terrible for those who do not have the work time in their own areas. That is not the way the system should be going. It could be done with balance.

The original system allowed 40% of eligible EI earnings to be kept while working on claim without any clawbacks. If the government had introduced legislation with the 50% clawback starting after the 40% level, then the system would have worked for everyone and it would not have increased inequality.

I want to give the House a couple of examples that are coming our way. Constituent one is a nurse from my riding. She is on parental leave. She lives 45 minutes away from the hospital. The hospital only needs her for one four-hour shift. Another nurse I know works an eight-hour shift, but they only need her for one hour.

The nurse has to hire a babysitter, put gas in the car and drive 45 minutes each way. She is only getting four hours work, but the benefit of that is that it helps the hospital with its scheduling and maintains the nurse's skills. She is in the hospital once a week, seeing patients, seeing any new computer changes and keeping up on all the things she has to do as a registered nurse working in the health care system. Therefore, it keeps her in the field and her skills sharp, which is a real benefit to the health care system.

However, the government, in its lack of wisdom through this change, is now clawing back half of those wages. She is only getting paid 50¢ on the dollar because of this change. That is hurting both the health care system and the nurse as an employee, because she no longer has benefits from going to work. In fact, she said she could not afford it and told the hospital she could no longer work that shift because it was costing her financially. That is a loss to the health care system, and there are hospitals with several such employees. That is the impact of these changes.

• (1210)

A second constituent had this to say in her letter:

Business of Supply

I do taxes for a living so our season is 3-4 months in the Spring. When the information was sent earlier in the year about the 50% clawback, I misunderstood the depth of the changes. I assumed (because it wasn't stated clearly) that those on E.I. would still be allowed to earn 40% without it affecting their E.I., and everything they earned while working would, instead of coming off dollar for dollar, come off 50% on the dollar.

However, this is so not true to my dismay 2 weeks ago. There is no allowable earnings? What's to entice people to work while on E.I.? The thought of making half of their wages? We now have to weigh the option of whether to work or whether to stay home because nobody wants to work for free.

There are really four things happening here as a result of the minister's changes. First, the great majority of people in Atlantic Canada are earning far less while working on claim than they were under the old system. Let us keep in mind that these people see it very vividly.

If they were on employment insurance prior to August 5, whether it was parental leave, regular EI, fisheries EI or compassionate care, and they were working while on claim, then they would get their check following August 5. Their total net disposal income, what they get on EI plus what they earned while working on claim with the new clawback, very vividly shows that they are getting less. They can see it because they were in the system before and they can see the return now.

There are four impacts. First, the majority of employees in Atlantic Canada have far less disposable income under this system. Second, employers are affected in that if they want a person for a day or a day and a half a week, they are not going to be able to get them because people cannot afford to work when half of their wages, 50¢ on the dollar, are being clawed back by the Conservative government.

Third, the economy is impacted, because there will be a loss of productivity. Employers will not be able to find employees for short-term work. A potato farmer who has truckloads of potatoes to grade but is only going to have work for half a day a week, where is he going to get employees?

Fourth, and dangerously, it will create an underground economy. People will say, "Look, I know you need workers and I know I cannot afford to work and claim it, so can you pay me cash?"

That is the reality of the system, those four serious points.

Out of concern, I took a number of cases from Atlantic Canada and asked the Library of Parliament to do an analysis of the old system and the new system. They produced a document entitled, "Case studies for the new pilot project, working while on claim".

Mr. Speaker, because it has been mentioned here in the talking points of the government, you will know that the minister did provide an example, which she put in her letter. However, these are real case studies based on real lives. They tell a story. In all of these cases, people are getting less now than they were under the old system. That is increasing the inequity within our country.

At the very beginning of this document, it explains the system and how it works. It is very clear from a question by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister that was addressed to the member for Cape Breton—Canso that he does not understand the system.

In conclusion, as the government does not understand the system and as this document is from the Library of Parliament, which does good work, I wonder if I could have unanimous consent to table this report so that government members could see actual cases and the explanation of how the system really works or does not work.

• (1215)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before we go to questions and comments, does the hon. member for Malpeque have the unanimous consent of the House to table the document?

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): There is no consent.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahma (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I find that the Liberal Party really has some nerve: it gives a speech on the effects of the cuts and changes to employment insurance even though the member for Malpeque was in the caucus that decided to take \$57 billion out of the fund.

How can the member have any credibility today when he talks about the impact of the employment insurance measures on families and the unemployed, given that he was a member of the Liberal caucus responsible for those machinations?

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I do not really want to go after the member for Saint-Jean, but his question shows what is wrong with this House of Commons.

There is a real issue with people in poverty. I cannot change what happened 10 years ago. In fact, it does not matter today. I can tell members what we did as a government in balancing the books and leaving the current government with a surplus.

However, for the member to get up and ask a question about 10, 15, or 20 years ago when people's daily lives are being injured, and for it to come from the NDP which claims to care for people, is not the way things should be done around this place.

We have a problem. It is a problem with employment insurance and the changes that came into effect on August 5. There is a solution to that problem. It is for the government to recognize that it made a mistake and to institute the 40% again in its new system. That would fix the problem.

However, I have a problem in this place with the way we attack each other as parties all the time and miss the real point, which is the problem with the EI system now.

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, maybe we can give some more recent examples for the member from the Liberal Party of the things he has voted against that actually do harm Canadians.

Business of Supply

The Liberals voted against the child tax credit. They voted against the national child benefit supplement. These help low-income families make sure that their children are well provided for. They voted against Helmets to Hardhats. They voted against the targeted initiative for older workers. They voted against apprenticeship opportunities for young Canadians.

I think it is a little rich for the members opposite, in particular, this Liberal member, who voted against all these initiatives for the unemployed and low-income families, to say that we have not done enough.

We are doing a great deal. We are creating jobs. They are not.

I ask—

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

The hon. member for Malpeque.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have created some jobs but they have certainly increased the number of unemployed in their term in office, and now they have undermined the system and are setting up a new system that has in fact increased inequity.

However, the parliamentary secretary just made the point that I expressed a few minutes ago. Instead of dealing with the issue of today, she goes back to the votes of yesterday, of two years ago, of five years ago.

I can go back to the votes, for heaven's sake, in Brian Mulroney's time or when it was the Reform Alliance Party and say, "You voted against this. You voted against that". It does not matter for this discussion.

The parliamentary secretary destroys her own credibility with that kind of question.

I am embarrassed for her that she gets up in this House every day and spouts PMO talking points, as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister did earlier, which shows that they do not know the system they imposed on unemployed Canadians and that they are increasing inequity.

I say to her, forget your talking points and fix the problem.

• (1220)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before we resume debate, I would like to remind all hon. members, when they have the floor, to make their comments directly to the Chair, and for those who do not have the floor to give respect to their colleagues when they have the opportunity to speak.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Okanagan—Shuswap.

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Souris—Moose Mountain.

I will try to bring the amount of energy of the past speaker, but I will add a little more fact to my speech.

I am disappointed in today's Liberal motion, specifically the attempt by the Liberal Party to play political games with the registered disability savings plan, the RDSP. Even more troubling

about this rather distasteful attempt to play politics here is the fact that the Liberal Party actually voted against the creation of the RDSP.

Early after being elected in 2006, our Conservative government recognized that parents of children with severe disabilities faced emotional strains and financial hardships that were often mentally and physically overwhelming. One of the difficult burdens these parents face was the thought of what would happen to their son or daughter in the future, especially after they were gone. It is not an easy topic to come to grips with and not one we would want to sully with political games.

That is why our Conservative government went about creating what became the RDSP by talking to Canadians most impacted directly. We struck an expert panel that toured the country and listened to hundreds of stories, often difficult stories, forcing those involved to consider those events in life that we did not like to talk about frequently. The expert panel held a very open and public consultation. It considered the advice, talked to experts and conducted more research. From that process, a detailed report entitled "A New Beginning" was released in December 2006, with numerous recommendations. The report is available online on the finance department's website and I encourage all Canadians to read it.

I would draw the attention of Canadians to pages 29 and 32, which discuss at length the eligibility criteria to become a beneficiary and a number of possible eligibility criteria the panel considered, to which today's motion alludes.

From the advice they heard during their deliberations, panel members recommended that eligibility to become a beneficiary of a registered disability savings plan be coincidental with eligibility for the disability tax credit as defined in subsection 118.3 of the act and that there be no additional eligibility requirements.

Making the disability tax credit eligibility a requirement for the RDSP was deemed, as per the panel's report, the most appropriate way to ensure that the plan would be targeted to those with a severe and prolonged disability, based on a definition of disability that was already used and accepted in the income tax system.

With respect to the disability tax credit, it is beneficial to review the general policy rationale and eligibility criteria. Specifically, the disability tax credit provides tax relief to individuals: markedly restricted in their ability to perform a basic activity of daily living due to the effects of one or more severe or prolonged impairments in mental or physical functions; significantly restricted in their ability to perform more than one basic activity of daily living, if the cumulative effect of their restrictions is equivalent to having a single marked restriction in the ability to perform a basic activity of daily living, as certified by a qualified health practitioner; or would be markedly restricted were it not for extensive life sustaining therapy three times a week or at least 14 hours in total.

Business of Supply

With the exception of blindness, no specific impairment or condition automatically grants eligibility for the disability tax credit. Rather, eligibility for the disability tax credit is determined on a case-by-case basis based on the effects of the impairment.

• (1225)

The Canada Revenue Agency is responsible for administering the Income Tax Act. Determining whether an individual qualifies for disability tax credit is the responsibility of the CRA. This objective approach ensures that tax relief is provided to those most in need.

Furthermore, the current eligibility criteria are consistent with the advice of another advisory panel, the Technical Advisory Committee on Tax Measures for Persons with Disabilities, established in 2003 under the former Liberal government, to provide advice on how to address tax issues affecting persons with disabilities.

The committee's final report was submitted in December 2004 and contained 25 recommendations. As the report was submitted to a Liberal government, the Liberal Party no doubt recalls that the committee made several recommendations regarding the eligibility criteria for the disability tax credit and that in 2005 the Liberal government accepted the committee's policy recommendations.

The disability tax credit continues to abide by the eligibility criteria the former Liberal government accepted. Nevertheless, our Conservative government knows that the registered disability plan is a program that can always be improved. That is why, when we created it, we explicitly committed to reviewing it three years after it became operational. As members may know, this review occurred between October and December 2011.

Again, our Conservative government encouraged all Canadians, including individuals, families, groups representing Canadians with disabilities, financial institutions and experts in the field, to share their views on the registered disability savings plan. Based on their feedback received during the review, our economic action plan proposed a number of measures to improve the RDSP.

In recognition of the fact that beneficiaries who were disability tax credit ineligible might, due to the nature of their condition, be eligible for the disability tax credit for some later year, it proposed to extend in certain circumstances the period for which a registered disability savings plan may remain open when they became disability tax credit ineligible. This measure would apply to registered disability savings plans where the beneficiary had become disability tax credit ineligible and where a medical practitioner certified in writing that the nature of the beneficiary's condition made it likely that the beneficiary would, because of the condition, be eligible for the disability tax credit in the foreseeable future.

I should also note that in response to feedback from Canadians, we also recently passed legislation to ensure that individuals could appeal, in every case, a determination concerning their eligibility for the DTC.

Rest assured that the government is keenly aware of the importance of the registered disability savings plan to Canadians with severe disabilities and their families. To that end, we remain committed to ensuring that support is provided to those most in need. We will not play politics with it and strongly advise the Liberal Party

to do the same, especially considering the fact that it voted against the registered disability savings plan's very creation.

Instead I ask the Liberal members to listen to the stories of those Canadian families that have been touched by the RDSP, families like Antonia Maioni's. Antonia is a noted professor of political science at McGill University, but she is also the mother of a very special boy. In her words, as written in the *Globe and Mail* recently, she says:

—while most people are worrying whether they can maintain their lifestyle in retirement, parents of the disabled are more apt to wonder whether we'll have the strength or the means to care for our adult dependents—not to mention what happens when we're no longer around.

She commends our government for bringing forward the registered disability savings plan for these children with disabilities so they can rest assured there will be provision for them in the future.

I have heard a lot of words from the Liberals, but we have not seen a lot of action. When they do act, it is to vote against the measures of our government that bring support to families that need it. I ask all members of the House to join with me and vote against the Liberal record of inaction.

• (1230)

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was interested in the hon. gentleman's remarks about the registered disability savings plan. Part way through his speech he said that he was always interested in ways to improve the plan and he listed a number of improvements. That is good and helpful, but he did not deal with the one that is included in the motion today.

The motion today notes that there are some people who suffer from chronic health problems, like multiple sclerosis, who will face some very difficult circumstances in future, but may be perfectly fine or in reasonably good shape today. However, they are worried about what will follow years down the road.

By making the disability tax credit the threshold for the registered disability savings plan, it means those people cannot have access to a registered disability savings plan because they are not disabled today. Sadly, they probably will be in the future but not today.

What is wrong with finding some way to revise the access point to the registered disability savings plan to allow those people who have these chronic conditions to begin to prepare today for the unfortunate circumstances they will face in future years?

Mr. Colin Mayes: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of Parliament putting together expert panels to review these issues is to take their advice. They get the input from Canadians across the country, meditate on what they have heard and make recommendations to the government. This was not a recommendation at that time, but I trust the judgment and the knowledge of the panel.

Regardless whether that was included, the fact is the other party voted against any establishment of the disability pension. Therefore, I cannot understand why all of a sudden it has a concern for it now.

Business of Supply

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the debate this morning and it seems there is somewhat of a disconnect. Discussion before us is on the growing income gap and inequality in the country. If we look at the expert numbers that come in, the income disparity is greater now than at any time since before the Great Depression. That is a shocking fact, regardless of what one's political beliefs are. The fact that the top 1% in our country are bringing home one-third of the wealth is shocking in a country that sees itself as solidly middle class.

Does the hon. member think that is a problem? If he thinks that is a problem, then we can begin to look at solutions. If he thinks it is perfectly okay that there is a growing income gap, that people at the bottom are starting to fall through the cracks and that young students are paying higher levels of debt without being offered a chance to make their way in the economy, then that is a different discussion. For balance in a good growing economy, a growing income gap is either a problem or not.

I would like to hear whether my hon. colleague thinks this is an issue that should be dealt with.

Mr. Colin Mayes: Mr. Speaker, the member's question gives me an opportunity to tell Canadians the good news about what we have done in past budgets to improve their quality of life.

First, we have lowered taxes so the average family of four pays over \$3,000 less taxes in a year. We have also dropped the GST by 2%, which puts more money in the back pockets of Canadians. In fact, I calculated that \$38 million a year just in my constituency alone does not go to Ottawa and stays in the back pockets of my constituents.

We raised the GIS exemption from \$500 to \$3,500, benefiting 1.6 million seniors.

We have the child care allowance of \$100 for each child under six. When I campaigned in the last election, I heard from young mothers who said that it was a great thing, that it really helped their budget and they thanked us for doing that.

We have a number of initiatives to create jobs so people can work and get better jobs. Our committee has studied skills training to empower Canadians to get employment or better jobs.

We have done a number of things to improve the standard of living. In fact, this is the first time in this decade that the centre of income in Canada has surpassed that of the United States.

• (1235)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today and to respond to this motion. It covers a number of areas. I would like to highlight our government's success in ensuring that all Canadians have the opportunity to access post-secondary education. My focus will be on that aspect of it.

As a government, our focus is on jobs and economic growth, and we recognize that ensuring educational opportunities for our youth is vital to our competitive advantage as a nation.

Over the last several years, the OECD has consistently reported that Canada has the highest proportion of post-secondary graduates in the OECD and the G7.

It is not just the OECD that recognizes the success of Canada's post-secondary education system. This month the Council of Ministers of Education released *Education Indicators in Canada*, in which it found that Canadians are better educated than they were 10 years ago. It also reiterated that Canadians have one of the highest post-secondary attendance rates in the developed countries. This certainly is an important indicator of how we are doing overall. The progress we made in the last number of years has been very significant.

Our success in post-secondary education and training contributes to our labour market productivity and competitiveness. It sparks inspiration, drives innovation and pushes us to succeed in the global economy.

Understanding this, our Conservative government has placed a premium on improving access to learning and training opportunities. It is our Conservative government's policies that are ensuring Canada remains a leader in post-secondary education.

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, HRSDC, contributes to Canada's growth and future prosperity by providing supports to students so they can obtain the skills they need to excel in today's demanding job market.

According to the OECD, Canada's youth employment rate is the second lowest among our economic peers. Undeniably, education falls under the provincial jurisdiction and domain, but we do everything within our jurisdictional powers to reduce barriers to those seeking a higher education.

We are taking action in priority areas where we can make a difference. One of the most important areas is removing financial obstacles, which will ensure that an individual's family finances do not determine his or her ability to access post-secondary education. Of course our most powerful tool to establish and accomplish this is the Canada student loans program. In 2010-11, the program served more students than ever before in its history. More than 500,000 students received support to pursue their post-secondary education. Since 2008, our government has implemented major improvements to student financial assistance to help students achieve their educational and future employment goals.

Budget 2008 introduced the Canada student grants program, a very important program. These grants provide upfront, non-repayable assistance to students from low- and middle-income families, as well as students with permanent disabilities or dependents. In 2010-11, more than 320,000 students received funding through the student grants program. That is an increase of 25,000 students over the previous year.

Business of Supply

Budget 2008 also brought in the repayment assistance plan, which helps borrowers experiencing difficulty repaying their loans. I have heard directly from students in this regard. It allows them to make affordable payments based on their family income and family size. In 2010-2011, 165,000 students benefited from this plan. In fact, 90% of the students on the repayment assistance plan did not have to make any payments at all. The success of this program has led to an all-time low in student default rates. It is a very important program for students and one that is well received. The difference is quite noticeable. In the 2003-04 year, under the previous Liberal government, there was a 28% default rate. In the 2009-10 year, our Conservative government reduced this to a 13.8% default rate.

Our government has also expanded online services enabling people to apply for and manage their loans online, everything from applications to loan repayments. This provides a more convenient service to students who are increasingly accustomed to managing their lives online, while at the same time replacing a lot of old paper-based processes.

Year after year, we introduce new measures to make post-secondary education more accessible. Sadly, each year we see the opposition vote against making post-secondary education more accessible.

●(1240)

Budget 2010 announced significant supports for Pathways to Education to help disadvantaged youth pursue post-secondary education. This program is a community-based charitable group that was founded in Regent Park in Toronto in 2001. It encourages disadvantaged youth to stay in school and go on to college or university, as education is very important if they wish to advance. It focuses on addressing both financial and non-financial barriers to post-secondary education, and no doubt getting an education is a key.

The program has been so successful that it has expanded to 11 communities over the past decade and has helped to significantly reduce high school dropout rates. Federal funding will help Pathways improve its programming and expand to even more communities across the country, helping up to 10,000 youth access the program.

I can proudly say that we are delivering on these commitments despite the opposition voting against all of these initiatives.

In budget 2011 we expanded the eligibility for both the Canada student loans program and the Canada student grants for full and part-time students. We increased the amount of income students can earn, so they can earn more and still qualify for financial assistance. This is something that the students themselves requested and we have listened to them.

Our government has doubled the amount of money full-time students can earn while they study, from \$50 to \$100 per week, without affecting how much they can receive in loans.

Since January 1 of this year, new and existing loans for part-time students are interest-free during their studies. This change will save students on average close to \$350 a year. Reducing this financial burden will enable part-time students to better balance the responsibilities of work and home while studying. It will also help

to put a post-secondary education within the reach of more Canadians.

As well, we have committed significant funds to forgive a portion of the Canada student loans for family doctors, residents in family medicine, nurse practitioners and nurses who work in rural or remote communities. This will provide incentives to new graduates to consider working in parts of the country in urgent need of these services, including first nations, Inuit and Métis communities.

As a member of Parliament from a rural region of the country I can attest to the fact that we need more doctors in rural Canada. In fact, just recently as I was flying to Ottawa, a constituent sitting next to me raised this issue and the fact that getting doctors and nurses in rural areas is a grave difficulty and an important concern to the community.

Doctors will be eligible for up to \$8,000 in loan forgiveness per year to a maximum of \$40,000. Nurses and nurse practitioners will be eligible for Canada student loan forgiveness of \$4,000 per year up to a maximum of \$20,000. These benefits will become available in the spring of 2013.

We are not finished yet.

We will continue to work with our provincial and territorial colleagues to streamline the system. For instance, we just recently reached an agreement with the Government of British Columbia to integrate the province's loan program with the Canada student loan program. B.C. students now only need to deal with one service provider instead of two, the National Student Loans Service Centre.

Also in time for the 2012-13 school year, full-time students in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador will no longer need to complete a loan agreement every time they receive funding. Instead, most students only have to fill out one loan agreement for the entire duration of their studies. The six provinces we are partnering with on these multi-year agreements represent 85% of Canada student loan borrowers. We are looking to make similar arrangements with the remaining jurisdictions.

Thus far I have only talked about our government's direct assistance to students and their families, which is enabling young Canadians to attend college or university. That does not even begin to cover the many other ways we support post-secondary education.

Let me remind the House that the Government of Canada also underwrites research and infrastructure funding, and of course it transfers money to the provinces and territories that they spend on education.

All told, our government invests \$10 billion each year to post-secondary education opportunities for Canadians, money that is making a major difference in the lives of post-secondary students and our country as a whole.

Business of Supply

●(1245)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my friend and colleague from Souris—Moose Mountain chairs our human resources committee and does an admirable job. The point is that governments make mistakes on occasion. Somewhere along the line governments legalized smoking tobacco, and we know the devastating impacts that has on people's health now, but somewhere along the line governments thought that was okay.

The other day, the minister responsible for the Canada Revenue Agency admitted that her department had made a mistake and she was taking actions to correct that. We even had a colleague here from my party who tweeted and commended her on 'fessing up to making the mistake, and the problem has gone away.

I do not think this is a mistake. A large amount of information is now at the minister's disposal. She was numb to an answer for the first couple of days, but I am sure she has been briefed by now. Evidence is overwhelming that people are being hurt by these clawback provisions in the regulations around working while on claim. It cannot be a mistake.

The Conservatives have never provided a rationale as to why they want to hurt these people. Anybody who works less than three days in low-wage-earning positions is being hurt. What is the rationale?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, I would also like to congratulate my colleague on being appointed the vice-vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Human Resources. I obviously value his opinion and thoughts on the committee as well as in the House here. I am sure any of the ills he speaks of in previous governments would have had to have been those of the Liberal government of which he is a member. I know he raises issues with the benefit portion regarding working while on claim.

There is no doubt that, in the past program, people could earn up to the greater of 75% or 40% of their weekly benefits, but then their benefits were clawed back dollar for dollar. In the new program we have come out with that benefits a vast number of people, the clawback would not be dollar for dollar. They would be able to keep 50¢ of every dollar they earn in addition to getting their EI benefit. I do not know how this person feels that clawing back 100% of what they earn might be better than keeping 50% of what they earn. Keeping 50% of what they earn is far better. It certainly would be an inducement for people to want to continue to work so they can earn their wage while on EI and receive the EI benefit and receive 50% of every dollar they make.

Is that so difficult to understand? That is certainly a benefit.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoulu, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the hon. member's speech.

As I mentioned in another question, I am still shocked by the succession of fragmented, clientelistic measures.

Even the objective of the motion has been forgotten, namely correcting the growing income inequality in Canada. I am going to ask the hon. member a question on one very specific point.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, corporate tax on annual profits over \$500,000 has more or less been cut in half. That has

been the result of a combination of decisions made by different governments since the beginning of the century. So it is not in the exclusive domain of the Conservatives.

This has had a number of consequences, because it has led to a huge amount of speculation, all the more so since it was a global movement. But it has not prevented salaries from dropping radically in a number of groups in society. Neither has it prevented the loss of 500,000 manufacturing jobs nor the ransacking of pension funds.

So why does he keep advocating such devastating measures budget after budget?

●(1250)

[*English*]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that a lot of the action taken is to ensure that it pays to work and that each family can keep more of what they earn. Since we have taken over as government, an average family keeps about \$3,000-plus more than it would have previously, and that is a positive thing. We have taken initiatives to ensure we have enhanced things like the national child benefit and child tax credit, ensuring that families are the ones that benefit by the actions we take. We are ensuring that families can continue better under this government and its programs than they did in the past.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be sharing my time with the member for Kings—Hants.

The growing gap between the rich and poor in Canada is a sign that we as a society are failing to preserve the core Canadian value of equality of opportunity for all people in Canada. Unfortunately, it is clear that the Conservatives do not believe that government has a positive role to play in facilitating equality of opportunity for all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

This morning, our leader asked the House to call on the government to take several simple and immediate actions to reduce the growing income inequality in Canada.

Clearly, those measures can begin to reduce the unacceptable gap between rich and poor.

[*English*]

It is clear that the Conservatives' ideology is focused on leaving Canadians on their own to fend for themselves. We recently saw the Conservatives' answer to social inequality when the UN special rapporteur on the right to food highlighted serious food insecurity issues in Canada, in particular in aboriginal communities.

Business of Supply

We have seen the Conservatives' strategy play out time and time again. First, they emphatically deny that there is a problem and then savagely attack the credibility of those raising the issue. It is particularly shocking that aboriginal Canadians suffer from one of the largest gaps in terms of income inequality given that the Crown has a unique and historic fiduciary relationship with first nations people in Canada. The most recent Statistics Canada data shows that the median income for aboriginal peoples was 30% lower than that of non-aboriginals. Aboriginal Canadians are working to build sustainable prosperity in their communities but they can no longer count on their federal government as a partner.

Canadians know that education is the key to success. Appallingly, only one in three first nations students graduate high school and, under the Conservative government, the rate is getting worse. First nations receive only two-thirds of the annual per-student funding as non-first nations students in provincial systems but not one penny of the government's so-called new funding is targeted to close this annual \$3,500 per-student gap. Why does the government think that an aboriginal student is worth less than a non-aboriginal student and why does it think that aboriginal students do not require that same equality of opportunity?

[Translation]

The Liberals support equal rights to high-quality and culturally appropriate education for first nations students and recognize that the present situation prevents them from participating fully in the social, economic and cultural life of their communities and of Canada as a whole.

[English]

With first nations suicide rates five times the national average and Inuit suicide rates eleven times higher, the Conservatives are cutting the aboriginal youth suicide prevention strategy. These are young people who feel hopeless and helpless and the government is cutting help to them. Even though aboriginals are much more likely to suffer from diabetes, have significantly higher infant mortality rates and significantly lower life expectancies, the Conservatives are cutting aboriginal health programs. The National Aboriginal Health Organization, the aboriginal diabetes initiative, the aboriginal health human resources initiative and the aboriginal health transition fund have all been cut by the government, but the government knows that social inequality is the key to health inequality.

Despite overcrowding rates on reserves six times those off reserve and more than 40% of on reserve homes in need of major repairs, the Conservatives have no plan to deal with the crisis in first nations housing.

• (1255)

[Translation]

Last November, the Conservatives supported a motion made in this House by the Liberal Party. The motion urged the government, as a priority, to address the needs of first nations communities whose members have no access in their homes to running water fit for drinking. This crisis requires more than those words; it requires action from the government.

[English]

The government has failed to provide funding to upgrade the huge numbers of first nations water and waste water systems, which have been determined by the government's own national assessment to be at either high or medium risk.

The government is turning its back on first nations, Métis and Inuit Canadians and the Canadian values of compassion and fairness. We know that health outcomes are the ultimate report card for the success of a society. Closing the gap in the health status of first nations, Inuit and Métis will only be possible if the government chooses to accept its role to address the equality of opportunity for the first peoples of Canada.

Since 2009, Richard Wilkinson's book, *The Spirit Level*, has brought together the evidence and raised the consciousness about the role of inequality and health outcomes. I will quote from his new and updated edition, *The Spirit Level: Why Equality Is Better for Everyone*. It reads:

It is now time egalitarians returned to the public arena. We need to do so confident that our intuitions have been validated and found to be truer than most of us ever imagined. Because the evidence shows that few people are aware of the actual scale of inequality and injustice in our societies, or recognise how it damages the vast majority of the population, the first task is to provide education and information.

Understanding these issues is already changing attitudes to inequality among politicians. In Britain, *The Spirit Level* has been endorsed across the political spectrum. In a major speech at the end of 2009, David Cameron said that the book showed that, among the richest countries, it is the more unequal ones that do worst, according to almost every quality of life indicator.

In September of this year, in his first major speech as the leader of the Labour Party, Ed Miliband said:

I do believe this country is too unequal and the gap between rich and poor doesn't just harm the poor, it harms us all....

Words are a start, but changing policies and politics, changing the way our societies organise themselves, will require the evidence to be recognised even more widely.

Few tasks are more worthwhile than this as we think *The Spirit Level* shows. The health of our democracies, our societies and their people is truly dependent on greater equality.

I am calling on the government today, if it is to share embassies with the British people, maybe it could listen to the experts and the politicians who are in the United Kingdom now on the importance of working on social inequality.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my recollection is that during the nineties the Liberal Party actually cut \$25 billion in social funding right across the country and hurt every aspect of every province and every citizen in this country.

Then the Liberals went on to actually steal some money from Canadians to put into brown envelopes to help other Liberals. Recently they voted against a number of our initiatives, such as the EI hiring tax credit, the targeted initiative for older workers and the Helmets to Hardhats.

Business of Supply

I could go on, but I will ask my question. How does the member square what her party did with what her speech says today?

• (1300)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, the member's question is a fantastic opportunity to explain that after we inherited the \$43 billion deficit, the debt that the Conservative Party had given us, our economy was viewed by the rating agencies to be a basket case. There had to be serious measures, which were done with consultation with Canadians, in order to understand that the interest that would be paid on that debt would get in the way of us doing the important things that we knew needed to be done in terms of investment.

How did we move on early learning and child care that we know is very important in terms of single moms being able to go to work and become taxpayers if they wanted to do that.

It is unbelievable that the member would ask us why we have voted against budget after budget, which is exactly the "survival of the fittest, fend for yourself" kinds of programs that the Conservative ideology continues to visit upon the people of Canada, including the 60% of Canadians who did not vote for the Conservatives.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to an extent, I will echo the comments of the hon. Conservative member by asking a question to the hon. member, who was, in fact, a member of the Liberal government some years ago.

It is a little ironic to hear them talk about inequality today, knowing that the Liberals like to present themselves as the defenders of equality. But instead the motion highlights the weaknesses of the Liberal approach because we know that, from 1989 to 2009, the Gini coefficient increased substantially, from 0.28 to 0.32. This index is widely used in the field to calculate income inequality in every country in the world.

Can she explain why their approach did not work when the Liberals formed the government and why the inequality continued to increase for all those years?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, it is really a shame to hear my colleague attack the Liberal Party instead of the Conservative Party. Progressive thinkers have to work together in the interest of all Canadians. I think that, just like in England, this is not a partisan approach; it is an approach that all parties can adopt to help this country's most vulnerable people.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I was pleased when the hon. member for St. Paul's mentioned a book that I think is critical to this debate: *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone*, by British researchers Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett. It is a substantial body of work and its data shows a wide variety of indicators such as rates of violence, successful child rearing, infant mortality, crime and health outcomes.

In every one of the indicators that they checked, wealthy countries like the U.S., U.K. or Canada, where income disparity is wide, they found that people were less well off than in those countries where, relatively speaking, people were more equal. The strength of the middle-class then is a key to our health as a society.

I would like to ask my hon. member what other insight she took from that book.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, I think the other piece that comes from *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone* is the issue of social inclusion, that we are all in this together and it does not pit one level of society against another, as our leader said this morning. This is actually about being all in the same boat and people coming together with their neighbours.

We know that social inclusion is important just as not smoking is to health outcomes. The fact is that inequality begets division and jealousies.

We are calling on the government today to admit the problem of the diminishing middle-class, the bigger gap between the rich and the poor, and the damage that does to our country and to its spirit of getting along.

• (1305)

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is an important issue. In fact, in a recent survey around three-quarters of Canadians indicated that income inequality is one of the top economic issues that we have to deal with as governments and politicians.

This is not a partisan issue. Income inequality has grown in Canada on a secular basis over the last 30 years. It has grown under Progressive Conservative governments, Liberal governments and Conservative governments. It has grown under New Democrat provincial governments. It has grown under Liberal and Parti Québécois provincial governments in Canada.

While this is not a partisan issue, it is an important one. It is one that we should have a debate about and talk about what we as federal leaders can do, working in conjunction with provincial and municipal governments and leaders in Canada.

The reality is that there has been an acceleration in the gap between the rich and the poor in recent years in Canada and throughout the industrialized world. This is not an ordinary economic downturn and recovery cycle; it is a global economic restructuring. It is one where resource rich countries like Canada benefit disproportionately from the global demand for their natural resources.

However, within Canada, there will be growth in the gap between have and have-not provinces exacerbated by the provinces that have those natural resources versus those that do not.

The reality is that this is not something that the federal government or provincial governments can do alone. We need to work together.

The reality is that there are some types of government programs that can help with issues of income inequality. The working income tax benefit, which was introduced in the last fall economic statement of the Liberal government and embraced and continued under the current Conservative government, is a measure that both governments can claim responsibility for. It is a good policy. It is the kind of policy that can help break down the welfare wall, that barrier to those people who want to work but lack the economic incentives to do so.

Business of Supply

If we believe in that kind of public policy, we ought also recognize that tax credits for disability, or for children in sports or music or cultural activities or for caregivers, ought to be refundable. Because of the perverse nature of non-refundable tax credits, it the poorest of the poor, the people who need these benefits the most, who do not qualify for them.

The changes to OAS, again, are an example. If we evaluate who receives OAS, 40% of the people receiving OAS make less than \$20,000 per year and 53% make less than \$25,000 per year. There is a disproportionate hit to those with the lowest incomes. We all have to consider that when we are making decisions in Parliament.

I believe that the Governor of the Bank of Canada, Mark Carney, said it best when he remarked in regard to inequality that, "The people who say it's not an issue are wrong, and the people who say it's an issue and who want to create class warfare are wrong. The focus needs to be on ensuring equality of opportunity.... It's a massive issue; fundamental to society. It's not right that big swaths of society become discouraged and marginalized."

I think Governor Carney has nailed it, frankly. We have to focus on equality of opportunity. We cannot guarantee equality of outcome. However, we can work together to ensure equality of opportunity.

If we look at this, I believe one of the successes of the U.S. economy multi-generationally was the sense of hope, that one could be born into any station in the United States and have a shot at success.

I think one of the reasons why the U.S. economy is, and probably will continue to be, stagnant for some time is that people have lost that sense of hope, that capacity to grow and develop and for their children and someone else's children to succeed.

If we think of the drivers of equality of opportunity, where are the best opportunities to break multi-generational poverty?

I was just at the Canadian Council of Chief Executives' conference at the convention centre here in Ottawa. There was session focused on education and learning. They were talking about lifelong learning. They were talking about restoring the honour of trades. They were talking about early learning and child care.

●(1310)

These are CEOs of the biggest companies in Canada who were talking about how to address some of the issues, the drivers of equality of opportunity, and they were talking about early learning and child care and how important they are.

A federal government cannot act on early learning and child care alone, but there is no constitutional barrier to a federal government working in partnership with the provinces on that issue. I served in a cabinet where we signed agreements with every province and territory on early learning and child care. We committed federal funds and we worked co-operatively, because it is a national imperative. Quebec has a good system and I congratulate it and several Quebec governments for having implemented a program that has helped to strengthen equality of opportunity and upward mobility.

It is not just good social policy; it is good economic policy. The reality is that there is no area of educational investment that will yield more bang for the buck in its impact on people's success in the future and their growth economically and socially than in the years before they even get to grade 1 or the primary grade in the public education system.

These are the issues we should be talking about in this House, not pithy partisanship. We should be talking about ideas on how we can work together across party lines and with provincial governments to address these issues.

Let us look at the issues of aboriginal and first nations. It is not economically or socially sustainable to have the fastest growing and youngest population in the country as the most economically and socially disenfranchised at the same time. In the House, as politicians we have to develop the kinds of ideas and solutions, the head start programs, the early intervention programs, that can help save a generation of young aboriginal and first nations youth.

We also have to engage non-aboriginal Canadians in this discussion. Part of responsible politics is pedagogy. We have to engage non-aboriginals and we have to tell them that they in fact have as much interest in seeing young aboriginals and first nations members succeed as the members of those first nations communities themselves. If we do not address the issues of what is going on in aboriginal and first nations reserves, it is not only a social time bomb but also an economic time bomb for our country.

These are the kinds of issues we should be talking about when we talk about equality of opportunity. What we now see in Canada is a resource-driven recovery and a gap between resource provinces and non-resource provinces.

Alberta is investing massively in education, and I congratulate it, as that is exactly the right thing to do. Alberta has a progressive premier in Premier Redford out there.

At the same time, my province of Nova Scotia is cutting investment in public education by about 30%, because of budget issues.

One of the things that came out of the meeting of Canadian Council of CEOs today was that one of the CEOs was saying that an Alberta CEO has as much interest in the education system in Nova Scotia or Newfoundland as he does in the Alberta education system. The future workforce in places like Alberta and Saskatchewan could very well come from places like Nova Scotia and Newfoundland.

In fact, there is a vested economic interest, not just in those provinces but across the country, in strong education and in working with the provinces to ensure that they can afford to invest in that fundamental underpinning of equality of opportunity: strong public education.

One area we should be looking at, whether we are talking about learning and lifelong learning or restoring the honour of the trades, is the German model of apprenticeship and skilled trades. Germany has a robust economy, and they have not had the same growth in income inequality that we have had in Canada. One of the reasons is that in Germany they have never lost the honour of skilled trades.

Business of Supply

Over the last 30 years in Canada, we have lost the honour of skilled trades. We need to restore that. We have to work with apprenticeship programs. The federal government and provincial governments need to work hand in hand to deal with this issue.

• (1315)

The economic and social returns of dealing with income inequality and equality of opportunity issues today is one that can yield huge benefits for future generations of Canadians, and that is why this is an important issue that we should be engaged with in Parliament.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it seems that the Liberal Party and my colleague across the way tend to be slipping back and forth between talking about equality of opportunity and government trying to guarantee equality of results, which government cannot do. Everyone in the House would be wise to acknowledge that.

When the member talked about creating opportunity, he talked about restoring the pride in skilled trades, on which so much has been done over the last six or seven years in that specific regard. The member does not have a good record in voting in support of that, whether it was tax credits for skilled trades people or the investments we made through the economic action plan with provincial governments to build new skilled trades learning centres right across this country. These are the types of investments that the government has been leading on, which perhaps the member has missed.

I have great concern when I hear the member speaking about some of his concerns when at the same time his voting record indicates that when those very ideas and principles are championed by the government, he votes against them.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, I acknowledged in my remarks that no party has a monopoly on the solutions and the responsibility for this issue. Income inequality and inequality of opportunity have grown over 30 years under successive provincial and federal governments of all stripes. If the hon. member wants us to consider individual measures, his government ought to stop putting them and everything but the kitchen sink in omnibus bills that force members of the opposition in some cases to vote against measures that we may agree with.

I acknowledge that the working income tax benefit is actually helping people get over the welfare wall. It is one that was introduced by the member for Wascana when he was finance minister. It was embraced by the Conservatives. That is a good thing.

This is not a partisan debate. The member has trouble participating in non-partisan debates. This is a serious debate about the future of our country and whether or not we are going to continue to be the kind of country where people have a shot at success regardless of where they are born and that we continue to be a country where equality of opportunity is an underpinning of our social network and values.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on a speech

that I really enjoyed listening to. The issue of inequality is an important one that we do not hear enough about.

This summer, I reread John Rawls. He invites us to reflect on what we would want to do if we did not know where or how we would be born, whether into a poor family or a wealthier one, a rural community or an urban one, or with a mental or physical disability. What kind of society would we want to build if we did not know where we came from? What if we could all start from the same place? Most of us would want to create a society in which everyone has equal opportunity because we would all want every possible opportunity even if we were not favoured or privileged.

A public daycare program to help children and youth get a good start in life is something that all governments—federal and provincial—should be able to create by working together.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate the question raised by my colleague from Quebec.

It is interesting to hear a member from Quebec recognize the role of the federal government and the opportunity for that government to work with provincial governments to develop progressive policies, such as a national daycare system. This is another example of how we do not see the Constitution as a barrier to productive discussions leading to progressive policies.

It is possible to work with each provincial government to develop such programs. I hope that we will be able to do that in the House, that we will be able to discuss innovative ideas and develop progressive policies no matter which party we belong to.

I really appreciate the member's question.

• (1320)

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to be splitting my time with the very affable and capable member of Mississauga—Streetsville.

I am pleased to respond to the motion put forward by the member for Toronto Centre, as I always welcome an opportunity to compare our record to that of other governments.

For instance, in the 2003-04 year in which the Liberal government was in power, it presided over a 28% default rate for student loans. In the 2009-10 our Conservative government reduced this to a 13.8% rate.

In 1996 the poverty rate was 15.2%. In 2010, under our Conservative government, it was 9%. In 1996, under the previous Liberal government, 18.4% of children lived in poverty. This is a troubling number. In 2010, under our Conservative government, this number has been cut in half to 8.2%. Since 2006, 225,000 less children are in poverty than under the previous government.

It is not about national strategies and glamorous meetings. Rather, it is about getting the job done for Canadians with real action and a real plan.

Here are the facts.

Business of Supply

The Liberals gutted transfers to the provinces and territories with staggering, unprecedented cuts, totalling tens of billions of dollars annually in the mid-1990s, downloading that cost and responsibility on to the provinces and the municipalities.

Our Conservative government has increased them back beyond the 1990s levels to record levels. In fact, in my home province, by simply treating this in a principled, fair manner, we are treating all Canadians equally. Per capita funding has actually increased the amount of transfers to Alberta to record levels.

In 2012-13 the federal government will provide provinces and territories an all-time high of \$60.9 billion in major transfer support, an increase of a whopping 43% since 2005-06.

As a result of the actions of our government, the typical family in Canada pays \$3,100 a year less in taxes than under the previous government. We have increased transfer payments, there is less child poverty and lower taxes.

Unlike previous governments that just needed four more years, we have taken real action for all Canadians, especially middle-class and low-income families.

However, tax cuts and direct financial support can only go so far. We have been clear. The best way to fight poverty is to connect Canadians with jobs. Acquiring skills is crucial to securing a good job and a promising career in today's knowledge-based economy.

A post-secondary education is especially important when it comes to an individual's pocketbook. Research by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada indicates that a university graduate makes up to \$1.3 million more over a lifetime compared to a high school graduate.

I am proud to be part of a government that is ensuring more young Canadians can take full advantage of what higher education has to offer for themselves as individuals, but also for our country and our society as a whole.

As all members of the House are aware, job creation and economic recovery continues to be our government's top priority. Thanks to the strong, capable leadership of the Prime Minister, Canada has created 770,000 net new jobs since the worst of the recession.

We have been clear. We are committed to creating more education opportunities for Canadians that will lead to better jobs and a sustainable and competitive economy.

We have invested \$10 billion annually in support to students and their families, research and infrastructure funding and transfers to provinces and territories to create post-secondary education opportunities for all Canadians. Much of that money goes directly to supporting students. In 2010-11 over 500,000 students received \$2.2 billion in Canada student loans. Since its introduction, 4.7 million students have received \$38 billion from the Canada student loan program to achieve their educational goals.

• (1325)

This investment has yielded impressive dividends. In 2011 Canada ranked first in overall post-secondary education attainment among OECD countries, with 50% of adults aged 25 to 64 having

some form of higher education. That compares to the OECD average of 30%. Even more remarkable, this share rises to 56% for younger Canadians between the ages of 25 and 34.

In addition to loans, there are the Canada student grants that provide extra non-repayable financial support. The grants reduce the amount students need to borrow, putting a post-secondary education within reach of families that would otherwise struggle to help their children attend college or university.

In my riding, working fathers and mothers realize that education is the key to their children's future and they often tell me they just need a little more help to ensure that every child has the opportunity for an education.

Over 320,000 students from low and middle-income families, along with students with permanent disabilities and those with dependents, have benefited from these grants in 2010 and 2011 alone. That is 25,000 more than benefited from these grants the year before. We also paid out \$703 million in Canada education savings grants, which provide a 20% top-up on parents' savings for their children's post-secondary education.

We have worked hard to make these important programs more accessible to all Canadians. We have made numerous improvements to them in recent years. They are helping more students than ever before pursue higher studies.

For example, income thresholds have been raised for part-time student loans. As of the 2012-2013 school year, that means students can earn more money but still qualify for loans and grants. The maximum amount part-time students can receive has recently been increased from \$4,000 to \$10,000.

It is projected that over 2,500 additional part-time students will be eligible for a Canada student loan in 2012-13, rising to just under 8,000 in year five and on an ongoing basis. Nearly 500 additional part-time students will receive a Canada student grant in year one, rising to about 1,500 in year five and continuing to rise after that.

Another major improvement is our decision to no longer charge interest on part-time loans. While a student is in school, this amounts to roughly \$350 in savings each year for the average student. These changes to part-time loans enable people who may be working full-time to achieve their educational goals for themselves and their families.

Business of Supply

We have also made it easier to pay off student loans. The repayment assistance plan allows borrowers to make affordable payments based on their family income and family size. In this way we help ensure student loan repayments are kept affordable. One hundred and sixty-five thousand students benefited from the repayment assistance plan just last year.

We also announced earlier this summer that we would be delivering on our commitment to forgive loans for new doctors and nurses who chose to practice in rural areas. In rural communities, such as mine, this is one of the most significant social enhancements we can do to help enable more of our young people to come back to our communities and practice medicine in our communities, and not just doctors, but nurses as well.

Our government has set aside \$9 million a year to forgive a portion of Canada student loans for family doctors, residents in family medicine, nurse practitioners and nurses who work in underserved rural or remote areas, such as first nations, Inuit and Métis communities.

From new online services for students to streamlined processes for applications and loan payments, often in partnership with the provinces and territories, we are taking major steps to increase accessibility to higher education.

Our government's mandate is to help the economy grow and create jobs, which means more employment opportunities for students. We are committed to having the most skilled and most educated workforce in the world.

What we need now is not a national strategy to tell us what is important. What we need is to continue with the plan that we have set forward, the plan for economic recovery and economic success.

It is time the opposition do more than just talk about poverty, equality and opportunity. It is one thing to talk about creating hope; it is another thing to actually provide hope and equality for all Canadians.

I urge all members to join our Prime Minister in implementing a real plan, which has already demonstrated impressive results.

• (1330)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I must also thank the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party for expressing just how much Canadians want a different government in Canada. They want a New Democrat government.

There is a back-and-forth going on here: “it is the Conservatives' fault”, “it is the Liberals' fault”, “we did that because the Conservatives left a deficit”, or “no, it was the Liberals”. “My dad is stronger than your dad.”

Governments have long used various ways to take money that belonged to workers, and today is no different because of poor decisions made by the Conservative Party. Currently, in Charlevoix, on the upper north shore, and in many other regions of Canada and Quebec, people are relying on seasonal industry because it is the last industry left for them. They will unfortunately have to make a choice.

Allow me to paraphrase a mayor in Charlevoix who wrote a letter to the Prime Minister: their choice is going away or going hungry. In either case, less money will circulate in the regions. These will be dark years for those regions. Why has the government forgotten the regions?

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Storseth: Mr. Speaker, I disagree with the premise of the member's question. The speech I gave and the speech by the member for Kings—Hants were not partisan rants. We talked about the things we had done, the real strategy we had implemented to help low-income and middle-class Canadians and increase opportunities for a better education and better jobs once they complete their education.

One thing I talk about, and think it was very important, was transfer payments, not only the increase in transfer payments but the principal change we made to treat all Canadians equal in the per capita mechanism we used to give out transfer payments. It not only increases them, but ensures the regions get per capita payments so every Canadian is treated equally. That is of the utmost importance.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we think of inequality, there is a serious argument to be put forward in terms of the role government has to play to ensure there are good quality jobs. Good quality jobs will often pay decent rates of return for the exchange of labour. We have seen a good example of that.

My friend from the New Democratic Party likes to blame the Liberals and Conservatives. I will use the example of Air Canada in Manitoba. The provincial government, which happens to be NDP, did not say a word in terms of defending the good quality jobs for Air Canada. When Air Canada was getting rid of those jobs, the legislation said that those jobs had to be maintained. The Government of Manitoba was definitely quiet. It was unfortunate that the Government of Canada did not recognize the good quality jobs that provided good living wages.

Does the member recognize the valuable role that governments play, whether it is Ottawa or provincial governments, in ensuring that certain industries grow and prosper and are able to provide the good quality jobs well into the future? I used Air Canada because that was a good example of aerospace industry jobs that Manitoba wanted to retain, but, for whatever reasons, they started to disappear, which caused a great deal of concern.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Mr. Speaker, I was worried that I would not get to hear from the member for Winnipeg North during my time in the House this afternoon.

He talks about having to respect the decisions of the provinces and then immediately criticizes the decision made by his province. Our government believes in a more decentralized decision-making process, which is why we are increasing transfer payments so more money can go into social, education and health transfers to the province.

Business of Supply

He talked about preserving good-paying jobs. I believe it is not necessarily the government's role to decide who will get which jobs. Our role is to provide for the equality of opportunity, to ensure every Canadian child has the opportunity to get an education. We can only do that by decreasing child poverty rates, increasing student loans and their ability to get post-secondary educations, and that is exactly what our government has been doing.

• (1335)

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to stand and discuss the record of the Liberal Party of Canada and its leader, who we know as the failed former NDP premier of my home province of Ontario, when it comes to improving the lives of Canadians in need.

How can the Liberal Party, which slashed transfers for health care and social services to the bone in the 1990s when it was in government, stand here and pretend to make such a claim?

How can the Liberal Party, which, when relegated to the opposition benches, voted against every measure our government brought in to help Canadians in need, now claim that it is concerned somehow about income inequality?

What matters in life and in Parliament is not what we say and the flowery motions that we bring forward in Parliament, it is the actions we take and how we vote. Let us discuss the real record of the Liberal Party. I will start from when the Liberal government was in power.

For 13 years, the Liberals held a majority government. When they had the votes to pass any piece of legislation or to enact any program, what did the mighty defenders of those Canadians in need do? They launched an attack on the poor, the sick and the needy like no government had ever done before or has done since. They gutted transfers to the provinces and territories with staggering unprecedented cuts totalling tens of billions of dollars annually. When they cut money to the provinces on health care, do members know what happened? Hospitals closed, nurses were fired and doctors saw their working conditions deteriorate like never before. When they cut money to social services, schools closed, colleges and universities crumbled, and community services were scaled back like never before.

This is not rhetoric and I am not exaggerating for effect. That is what happened. That is their record. I know the Liberals do not want to believe it and they may not believe me but they should listen to what one of their own, their current finance critic, had to say. The member for Kings—Hants described the Liberal Party of Canada's proud record of helping those in need by stating:

...the [Liberal] government balanced its books by slashing transfers to the provinces by forcing the provinces...to...face deficits, and health care systems and education systems in a crisis as a result of its inability and irresponsibility to actually tighten its own belt more significantly.

I have another quote from the member for Kings—Hants. He states:

Shifting the burden to the provinces...was the easy but cowardly way to accelerate deficit reduction. ... The Chrétien-Martin cuts sent the health and education systems into crisis in every Canadian province.

What a record. What an achievement.

We should not just take the Liberals' current finance critic's word for it. We should also listen to what the current Liberal leader said. When he was bankrupting Ontario, and I was there and saw it, and killing Ontario jobs with his reckless NDP tax-and-spend schemes, he had to face the brunt of the then Liberal government's slashing of transfers in the nineties when he was premier of Ontario. At that time he said:

...when the federal [Liberal] government decided in its wisdom that it would cut back unilaterally, particularly in the area of social assistance, it had a major and devastating effect on the people of this province.

Is that what the Liberal Party of Canada wants our Conservative government to emulate? Are those the lessons we have to learn from them, that those slash-and-burn actions of gutting hospitals and schools help combat income equality? As several of my colleagues noted earlier, the answer is obviously no.

• (1340)

The Liberals drove income inequality to its highest levels in over 40 years. For the good of Canada, I am happy that this Conservative government is taking no lessons from them, especially on transfers for health care and social services.

While the Liberal government slashed and cut, we actually increased transfers to record levels. In 2012-13, the federal government will provide the provinces and territories an all-time high of \$60.9 billion in major transfer support, an increase of a whopping 43% since 2005-06 under the previous Liberal government.

Unlike the Liberals, we have a commitment and have cemented it in law that those transfers under our government will never be cut and will always continue to grow each and every year.

In the words of the noted economist Jack Mintz, earlier this year in the *National Post*, "...the federal government has been more than generous with transfers to the provinces continuing to rise to levels not seen this past half century". We should think about that. Our approach to transfers, the most significant means by which the provinces help those in need, has been called "more than generous" by respected third party observers. The Liberals' approach to transfers, by the Liberals themselves, was called devastating, cowardly and crisis-inducing.

I think Canadians would be pretty quick to tell us which approach is the right approach for Canadian families and those Canadians in need. Yet, the Liberal Party today has the audacity to stand here and pretend that none of this ever happened. Sadly, I believe it has been so long since the Liberals were in government that they have simply forgotten the reality of the time and started to believe their own talking points.

Business of Supply

Perhaps knowing the shame of the Liberal record and wanting to atone, a senior Liberal member recently made a startling admission. In a recent interview, the member for Markham—Unionville said, "...in hindsight, the Chretien government—even though I'm a Liberal—cut perhaps too deeply, too much offloading...there were some negative effects". I applaud the member for Markham—Unionville for his admission of Liberal culpability as a first small step, but the Liberals need more than words.

The Liberals need to stop voting against every constructive step our Conservative government has taken since 2006 in Parliament to help Canadians in need. They need to stop voting against policies like the refundable working income tax benefit. This benefit makes it more attractive for low-income Canadians to stay in the workforce by removing the disincentives for them to work. It was a landmark achievement and it has been recognized as such by observers on all sides. The Caledon Institute of Social Policy called it "a welcome addition to Canadian social policy. It fulfills a long-recognized gap in Canada's income security system". The United Way of greater Toronto heralded it as "...positive changes that will help to improve the situations of low-income families".

It is clear that we deliver and the Liberals talk. We make things happen and they pretend. We invest in provinces and social services and they download. Our record is clear. We will take no advice from the record of the Liberal regime when it was government. We will continue to lead and we will continue to show Canadians the leadership they need, regardless of where they live in this country and regardless of their family situation. We will always be with Canadian families.

• (1345)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member has obviously been in the Conservative glass bubble for far too long. I think he is starting to believe what it is that he is saying. There are so many bad aspects to that speech, I do not know where to begin.

If the Liberal government had not attempted to address the Mulroney years of deficit financing and so forth, the country would have gone bankrupt in the early 1990s.

The fear that provinces like Manitoba had for health care back in the early 1990s was that the Conservatives were on the way, through tax point shifts, to no longer finance health care. It was the Chrétien government that reassured Canadians by coming up with the Canada Health Act to reinforce the federal government's commitment to finance health care, which takes people out of poverty and tries to narrow the gap.

I would suggest that the member might want to reflect on issues such as narrowing the gap by having legitimate day care, by addressing the aboriginal issues and by remembering the Kelowna accord. These are initiatives on which the Conservative government was to act upon taking government. Why would it have done that?

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Speaker, actions speak louder than words. They download, we invest. They cut, we give more. We work with the provinces, they rip them off. It is as simple as that.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it has been fascinating listening to my hon. colleague, although I do admit that when it comes to reality it is a bit like looking in a

funhouse mirror and, with those guys over in the corner, it is like falling down the rabbit hole. I do not want to go there at all.

On February 27, 2011, my colleague and every member of this House stood and voted to close the funding gap for first nation children under the Shannen's Dream principle. Our first nation children are the greatest resource that we have but the lack of education opportunities has been abysmal. Closing that funding gap is essential for developing this new economy.

My hon. colleague is talking about transfers to the provinces but the federal government has the responsibility for the welfare of and the schools for first nations children. What steps are the Conservatives taking to actually close the funding gap to have comparable levels to that of every provincial system in this country?

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Speaker, there is always more we can do when it comes to providing programs, services and support to our aboriginal communities. However, this government has invested millions and millions of more dollars each and every year into our aboriginal communities. We have been working in partnership with the Assembly of First Nations and other organizations across the country to ensure it is a true partnership. The federal government provides funding and works with the native communities because they are the ones who are running their communities and making important local decisions. We need to continue to do that.

I am proud of the record we have as a government on our relationship and funding for services in aboriginal communities. However, I am sure there is more to do. We will keep on with the job but we need the support of the opposition to keep moving the puck down the ice.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonaville—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what a hard act to follow. It is hard to believe someone in the House gets \$160,000 a year to repeat the talking points of a minister, but I guess that is the type of path we are going down here. A reasoned debate would be nice, probably one that is full of bluster and full of a lot of things.

Nonetheless, we can have a reasoned debate here on the motion we are bringing forward today, based on inequalities of income, on lifting those out of poverty, on policy requirements in order for people to get themselves from a position of feeling downtrodden to a position of bettering themselves. It does not take a lot of debate and a great deal of expense to fill the gaps in some of these cracks people are falling through.

There are several policies that came out in the last budget bill that really were disappointing in many ways. They were easily fixable.

One thing my colleague talked about earlier was the non-refundable tax credit. Let us take the example of the volunteer tax credit for firefighters. It is non-refundable. Therefore, if one falls below a certain income, one does not get any benefit whatsoever. As a result, it becomes an income tested tax incentive, an incentive for people to protect their family and communities through volunteer firefighter work.

Business of Supply

The average income in my riding is quite low compared to other ridings. Therefore there is a substantial number of volunteer firefighters unable to receive any benefit. What does it take to convert this non-refundable tax credit into a refundable tax credit? It does not take that long. It certainly is helping out the most needy in this particular case.

When we look at the situation we have here, we have volunteer firefighters, caregivers, all these people who have these small incomes, which may seem insignificant to many of us but are actually significant to them. If there is someone who is making \$20,000 a year, obviously this tax credit can become a significant portion of money throughout the year. Yet people in that income bracket or below it cannot receive the benefit. That is unfortunate. This is the type of policy, misgiving of policy, misappropriation of debate and policy, we need to look at in order for people to better themselves and get out of the situation they are in if they are receiving that kind of money.

Before I go on, I would like to add that I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for York West.

If one considers what we are debating today and its many aspects, the narrative is important. The narrative deals with people who are certainly receiving benefits from the government as a stopgap measure to get them to full-time positions. Employment insurance is something that has been discussed quite a bit in the House and certainly over the past few days.

Here is what is happening when one seeks out the devil that lies in the details. The budget states we are going to give people an increase for working while on claim. That means that if a person receives a certain amount of money, let us say \$200 per week in employment insurance, under the old system that person could earn up to 40% of that amount and would still have EI. That is the incentive to work, because even though people are keeping that money, they are also getting work experience. Perhaps they could get a full-time position at the place where they are working, when it becomes available. That happens quite a bit.

The government said it was going to increase that from 40% to 50%, yet I hear no applause. There is no applause because the devil is in the details. At 40%, a person could keep that money and nothing would happen to it. Now when the government said 50%, it meant the money would be clawed back 50% on every dollar made. There again is the devil in the details.

● (1350)

That is like going to a store and seeing the price of the shirt we want to buy is \$30. Then on the shirt itself there is a sticker that says "half price". Naturally, we get out the \$15 to pay and the clerk says, "I am sorry, but actually that is half price of the original price, which was \$60". That is what the government is doing. The devil is in that particular detail. That is why we have these debates so that we can talk about the people who fall through the cracks.

There are people right now who work two days a week while on EI in order to get a car or to move into their own home, but they cannot do that because the disincentive is built in.

I do not doubt in any way, shape or form that when people set out to do this, whether they were members of the Conservative Party or

whether they were bureaucrats, they were principled in saying that they needed to provide a benefit for people to better themselves. However, it almost seems like every time we do this, we always find a way to recede from what we promise.

In this particular case, we would be going from 40% to 50%, but not really, so less people get to qualify on this. It seems that is the magic number. The magic number is that the government needs to get those numbers down so people cannot avail themselves of that money, and therefore the government's cash on hand is better. It has a deficit to fight. We are aware of that. We, in this corner of the House, fought one. We succeeded.

We fought many things. We fought poverty. We fought for principles such as the Canada pension plan. Right now in my riding I have two offices, one in Gander and one in Grand Falls-Windsor. Both offices now get more calls about seniors' poverty than any other issue.

I have a lot of fishermen in my riding. Imagine how grave the situation can become for someone, let us say, who is a widower, for example, a gentleman I met whose income is now half of what it was because his wife passed away. He owns his own home and heating prices have gone sky high. What is built into this does not keep pace with the rising costs. What is he looking for? He is looking for targeted initiatives that allow him to bridge that gap, for that person to lift himself out of poverty.

In 2005, the Liberal government delivered a 2005 energy rebate. It was the guaranteed income supplement. What a fabulous idea, specifically for people who have rising costs for heating their own homes. The man I spoke of is now planning to move out of his house, not because he wants to but because he has to. He feels he cannot better himself in any way, shape or form, and the benefits that were there for him, small as they may have been, are not there any longer.

We just need a reasoned debate to study this, whether it is a large bill or a small bill, to look at this piece by piece and figure out what the ramifications are for someone like that gentleman who cannot make ends meet.

There is so much to talk about when it comes to inequality. Let us talk about youth. Right now, youth unemployment is skyrocketing in my area. People are moving, not because they want to but because they have to.

The government wants young people to invest in RRSPs. How can they do that when any cash they get on hand has to pay for things like groceries. If they manage to get a mortgage, they have to keep all their money for that. Retirement savings do not even factor in. Retirement savings goes down the list for someone in their twenties, and that is unfortunate because we have the ability to make life better for these individuals by seeking out the devil that lies in the details.

It is unfortunate for youth, for seniors and for a woman I know, a single mom with two kids who works two days a week and who has now been told that she will get less.

Statements by Members

The middle class folks, the 47%, that number that is used in the American media these days, thanks to Mr. Romney, are very frustrated. The worst part about it is not only are they frustrated but they are giving up, and that is where we fail.

• (1355)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The time for government orders has expired. The question and answer period for the hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor will occur when the House returns to this matter after question period.

Statements by members, the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is my great pleasure to rise today to celebrate two events that occurred this last weekend in my riding of Saanich—Gulf Islands.

The first was the celebration of the 100th birthday of our local newspaper. The *Peninsula News Review* has been published since 1912, when it was first called the *Sidney Review*. It is now published by Black Press. It covers communities for the Saanich Peninsula, and after 100 years it is doing a great job.

The second celebration, and I had the great honour of participating in this, was the 60th anniversary of the incorporation of the town where I live. We call it Sidney by the Sea. It is absolutely fantastic. I invite members to come visit. This was the 60th anniversary of its incorporation as a village. Everybody came out. We had a fantastic time at Beacon Park. We cut the cake and served it up for everyone.

I wish a happy birthday to the *Peninsula News Review* and a happy birthday to Sidney.

* * *

LONDON PARALYMPIC GAMES

Mr. Chungsen Leung (Willowdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the achievement of the Canadian men's wheelchair basketball team for their gold medal win at the 2012 London Summer Paralympic Games.

These first-rate athletes displayed passion and hard work that highlighted their abilities and proved that they are the best in the world.

It is important to know that the game was played on regular International Basketball Federation courts, with all the regulation dimensions, net heights and timing rules. The team plays basketball at a high level that leaves spectators seeing nothing more than pure athleticism.

In the past four Paralympic Games, the Canadian team has won three gold medals and one silver medal, proving that anything is possible for anyone. The team, which includes two athletes from the

greater Toronto area, Abdi Dini and Adam Lancia, competed against Australia in the final game, winning 64 to 58.

I know that all Canadians join me in congratulating all members of the Canadian men's wheelchair basketball team and head coach, Jerry Tonello, for this exceptional achievement. Their commitment on and off the court has been nothing short of outstanding and has shown Canadians, and the world, that success is within us all.

I ask all members of the House to join me in asking the team to accept our heartfelt congratulations.

* * *

[Translation]

RIGHT TO KNOW WEEK

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to draw attention to Right to Know Week, which is intended to make Canadians aware of their right to access information, a fundamental right, and the government's responsibility to improve its transparency. In 2005, the Prime Minister said:

[English]

Information is the lifeblood of a democracy. Without adequate access to key information about government policies and programs, citizens and parliamentarians cannot make informed decisions....

[Translation]

The Access to Information Act is 30 years old. Although it was ahead of its time in 1983, it has not been updated since then. Today, Canada is ranked 51st in the world, behind many developing countries. Although the Conservatives claim to be improving transparency, the reality has become much cloudier since the election of the Prime Minister.

Let us work together to bring the Access to Information Act into the 21st century. That is what the NDP is committed to doing, and we invite the government to do so as well.

* * *

2012 ETOWN AWARD

Mr. Robert Goguen (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my hometown of Moncton, New Brunswick, for receiving the 2012 Google eTown award, which recognizes communities where local businesses have a strong online presence.

[English]

Recipient communities are not only keeping up with the evolution of online business, they are leading their respective regions through this ever-changing medium.

Monctonians are resourceful, forward-looking and adaptable to new trends. This is demonstrated by the considerable online presence of Moncton's local businesses.

This award is a testament to Moncton's web-savvy businesses, which continue to grow by taking advantage of the enormous opportunities offered by the digital economy.

Statements by Members

I congratulate Moncton for receiving the 2012 Google eTown award.

[*Translation*]

Congratulations!

* * *

[*English*]

WALLACE WOOD

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand to pay tribute to the late Wallace “Wally” Wood and to recognize his outstanding contribution to his community, P.E.I. and indeed Canada.

Born in Marshfield, Wally was very influential in the agriculture community as a member of the Founding Committee, a member of the P.E.I. Soil and Crop Improvement Association, a member of the P.E.I. Dairy Producers' Association and president of the P.E.I. Federation of Agriculture.

Wally also had a keen interest in animal genetics and was involved in cattle breeding and the Maritime harness racing industry. He supported his community in being a lead advocate for the P.E.I. school milk program, chair of the provincial exhibition and the P.E.I. Marketing Council, a school trustee, and many positions I do not have the time to mention.

Rightfully so, Wally was inducted into the Atlantic Agricultural Hall of Fame in 2005.

He and wife, Doris, welcomed guests from the world over to Woodmere Bed and Breakfast with typical island hospitality. His respect for others was at the core of his very being and his love for his wife Doris and family was absolute.

I offer our thanks and respect to his family.

* * *

• (1405)

LANGLEY'S SENIORS OF THE YEAR

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to congratulate Langley's seniors of the year, Toots Tucker and David Esworthy.

These two people have been recognized in Langley for their cheerful spirits, generous hearts and countless hours of volunteering.

At age 83, David Esworthy has been inducted to B.C. Sports Hall of Fame. He is a past president of the Langley Chamber of Commerce and was awarded the chairman's award from the Vancouver Board of Trade.

Toots Tucker is 74 years old. She is a lady who has devoted her life to helping others. She volunteers with Langley seniors, the Langley Field Naturalists Society, the Canadian Blood Services, Cops for Cancer and many more.

These two incredible Langley residents have left a legacy for all Canadians to follow, giving back to their community.

We thank David and Toots for being who they are and for making Langley beautiful.

[*Translation*]

PEOPLE FIRST MOVEMENT

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, people with intellectual disabilities began the People First Movement in the 1970s in the United States in order to speak out against the labels imposed on them and the dependence they had to endure.

On September 13, the People First Movement of the greater Quebec City area welcomed me at the Ferland community centre for the launch of their 2013 calendar. This gave me the opportunity to meet the current president, Michel Aubut, the head of communications, Hélène Bernier, and people such as Yvette, Sylvie, Rémi, Yan, Simon and many others who have a wealth of ideas and an unwavering determination to live their lives with dignity. There are some people mentioned in their annual report that I was able to see.

The only limits that exist are those we impose on ourselves and those we allow others to impose on us. The members of the People First Movement taught me a valuable life lesson through their enthusiasm, curiosity and welcoming attitude. The respect that they have for others is impressive. We judge others too often and too easily. Our closed attitude is a hindrance to the building of a better society.

Thank you to the People First Movement of greater Quebec City for welcoming me with open arms.

* * *

FRANCO-ONTARIAN DAY

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2010, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario passed the Franco-Ontarian Day Act.

The Government of Ontario made a symbolic gesture to pay tribute to the exceptional contribution the francophone community makes to civil society in their province.

From now on, every year on September 25, Franco-Ontarians will proudly celebrate their language, heritage and culture. Today, the green and white of the Franco-Ontarian flag will radiate across the province.

French-speaking Ontarians have been in the province for 400 years. They help strengthen our country's linguistic duality and represent a cornerstone of our national identity.

Happy Franco-Ontarian Day to all Franco-Ontarians in Ontario and across the country.

* * *

[*English*]

FIRE IN SASKATCHEWAN MINE

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, early today a fire broke out at a potash mine in my riding, in Rocanville, Saskatchewan.

Statements by Members

Media have reported that emergency response teams have rescued nine miners and are fighting a fire in the mine. The media are also reporting that there are 20 more miners still underground.

As we hold our collective breath and watch with anticipation, I want to extend all of my personal hope, and I am sure the hope of everyone in this House, that all remaining miners will be rescued successfully, that everyone will be able to get to their homes, their families and loved ones safely and as soon as possible.

To the miners underground, their families and loved ones and the rescue teams involved, the collective thoughts and prayers of all members of the House are with them for a successful and safe rescue.

* * *

SUDBURY CLASSIC CRUISERS CAR CLUB

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to recognize the hard work and dedication of the Sudbury Classic Cruisers Car Club in organizing a charitable raffle to benefit the Sam Bruno PET scan fund in my riding of Sudbury.

Launching on Mother's Day, the cruisers sold 10,000 raffle tickets across northeastern Ontario, all for a chance to win a classic 1965 yellow Mustang coupe, which was raffled off this past weekend.

This classic car was offered to the cruisers on behalf of a donor who wishes to remain anonymous. I would like to thank this person on behalf of all those who will benefit from his enormous contribution, in trying to bring a PET scanner to Sudbury.

Ultimately because of this generous contribution, the Sudbury Classic Cruisers Car Club raised over \$45,000 towards the Sam Bruno PET scan fund, an amazing figure, obviously assisted by the chance to hit the open road in a classic cruiser.

On behalf of Sudburians, I would like to thank all involved in this raffle, including club president Gary Lonsberry, vice-president Ralph Constantineau and treasurer Mike Levesque, as well as the anonymous donor without whom such an amazing fundraising goal would not have been reached.

* * *

●(1410)

FLOODING IN THE PHILIPPINES

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians in my riding are very concerned about the flooding in the Philippines. Millions of people have been affected by tropical storms Saola and Haikui.

The Red Cross has even stated that more than 330,000 people are seeking temporary shelter in evacuation centres. In response to this desperate situation, our government is taking action.

I am proud that Canadian taxpayer investments through CIDA are making a difference for those in need. By working with the Red Cross, our government's work has helped 3.4 million people. This support will ensure that affected people are provided with safe drinking water, food and other much-needed items. As well, it will prevent disease and provide support to families.

Our government continues to monitor the situation closely to ensure that basic needs of affected people are met and to provide further assistance, if required.

* * *

[*Translation*]

WALK FOR BREAST CANCER

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on September 22, 39 men and women, including my colleague, the member for Gatineau, and I took part in the Walk for Breast Cancer, organized to raise money for the Fondation du Centre de santé et de services sociaux de Gatineau. The 30-kilometre walk raised \$50,000 for the cause.

We have come a long way in understanding and treating breast cancer. The mortality rate is 25% lower than it was in 1986. But the battle is far from being won.

Today, one woman in nine still risks having breast cancer in her life. In Canada, one woman in 29 will die from it. So it is very important to keep up the fight.

I am personally committed to taking part in next year's walk, and I invite all my colleagues, my colleague from Gatineau included, and my constituents to join me.

Together, we can make a difference.

* * *

[*English*]

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that the NDP leader wants to impose a \$20 billion carbon tax that will increase the price of everything.

Our government lowered the GST because we want to make it easier for Canadian families to pay for goods, but the NDP's only economic idea is to impose a carbon tax that would increase the price all Canadians pay for just about everything.

This month, as retail sales in Canada rise, it becomes even clearer just how risky the NDP's carbon tax scheme would be, stalling our economy in its tracks, raising prices and wiping out these positive economic numbers.

At a time when Canada's economy continues to recover from the downturn, the last thing we need is a \$20 billion NDP carbon tax that would kill jobs and stop economic growth in its tracks.

* * *

CHILD AND YOUTH NUTRITION STRATEGY

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, hundreds of thousands of children go to school hungry. When children go hungry, they may stop growing and may be too hungry to learn. And when they are older, they may be undereducated to work to their full potential.

Right across the country in provinces and territories, communities are asking for federal leadership to develop a comprehensive pan-Canadian child and youth nutrition strategy and to fully fund on-reserve aboriginal student meals.

A pan-Canadian nutrition program makes good economic sense resulting in better educational performance and health for children and youth, increased revenue for Canadian farmers, lower crime rates and reduced future health care costs.

Canada signed the 1992 World Declaration on Nutrition, and each of us has a responsibility to make that promise a reality. Our children cannot afford excuses that this is provincial or someone else's responsibility. Our children want food.

* * *

•(1415)

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, four years ago our Conservative government campaigned against the Liberal Party's plan to impose a job-killing carbon tax on Canadians. In that campaign Canadians agreed with us and sent us back to this place with a strengthened mandate.

A year ago, our Conservative government was once again campaigning against an opposition party's plan to impose a job-killing carbon tax on Canadian families. This time it was the NDP and its plan to raise \$21 billion in new revenue. In that campaign Canadians agreed with us and sent back a strong, stable, national Conservative majority government.

Now the new NDP leader is proposing a carbon tax that would go even further than the one rejected by Canadians just over a year ago.

Our Conservative government will once again stand with Canadians and fight this job-killing carbon tax that would increase the price of everything including gas, groceries and electricity.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN EMBASSIES

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are so nostalgic for the empire that they are counterattacking.

This is not a joke. They want us to undo a century of progress. First, they had an epiphany about the War of 1812 that they decided to share with every single one of us, and now rumour has it that the Prime Minister and his acolytes want to reopen the debate on the Naval Service Act of 1910, which came at a time when Canada was tentatively moving to distance itself from the British empire and develop its own foreign policy.

We were a strong, well-known nation that had found its place in the world, but under today's Conservatives, our Maple Leaf will now be tied to the Union Jack's apron strings, too weak to speak for itself. We will now be renting space in the Queen's embassies. How shameful. At least we can console ourselves with some free photocopies.

Oral Questions

Before croquet replaces lacrosse as our national sport and before we start singing *God Save the Queen* in the House, I would like to see the Conservatives man up and defend our reputation and our interests a little more vigorously, if they do not mind.

* * *

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians made it clear that they do not want a carbon tax that will jeopardize jobs and increase the cost of gasoline, electricity and practically everything, which is what the leader of the NDP has proposed.

What Canadians want is a government that focuses on jobs, economic growth and long-term prosperity, which is what our Conservative government is doing.

We cannot let the NDP do it. This is not the first dangerous idea that it has brought forward and that would result in job losses.

All Canadians remember that two NDP members went to the United States to lobby against the Keystone XL pipeline, which could potentially create 140,000 direct and indirect jobs for Canadians and \$600 billion in economic spinoffs over the next 25 years.

We now know the NDP economic plan: eliminate jobs.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 2010, the Conservatives promised new criteria for assessing foreign takeovers. Last week, we learned that the Conservatives will announce the new criteria at the same time as the decision on Nexen. This means one of two things: either the Conservatives are tinkering with the criteria to make them consistent with the decision they have already made to approve the purchase of Nexen or the criteria are ready but the Conservatives prefer to keep them secret.

Why have Canadians still not seen the criteria promised by the government?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has already made changes to the Investment Canada Act to ensure that we have a strong process. Clearly, we have to make some decisions from time to time. Our government will make decisions in the best interests of the Canadian economy.

*Oral Questions***FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Conservatives embarrassed the Americans by leaking confidential information. Yesterday, they botched their announcement on the United Kingdom by giving the impression that Canada's foreign policy is going to be under trusteeship from now on. And now the Prime Minister has decided to insult the international community by boycotting the United Nations General Assembly, even though he is going to be in New York this week while world leaders are sharing their views with the international community.

If the United Nations General Assembly is good enough for Barack Obama, why is it not good enough for our Prime Minister?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, never under any government has it been the practice of the Prime Minister to speak every single year at the United Nations General Assembly. The Minister of Foreign Affairs will be speaking this year. I am sure he will do a very good job. That said, there is no doubt that this government takes strong, clear and independent decisions on foreign affairs.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, he is photocopying his speech at the British embassy.

[*English*]

Two years ago the Conservative government lost Canada's bid for a seat at the UN Security Council, a first in Canadian history. This week the Prime Minister has turned down an invitation to speak at the UN General Assembly, even though he is already scheduled to be in New York.

Has the Prime Minister given up on Canada's role at the UN? We are merging our embassies with Great Britain. Is our delegation to the United Nations next?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I just said, never under any government has it been the practice of Canadian prime ministers to speak every year at the United Nations General Assembly. The Minister of Foreign Affairs will be speaking this year. I am sure he will do a very good job.

That said, nobody in Canada doubts, whether they people agree with us or not, that the government takes strong, clear and independent decisions on foreign affairs.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us get this straight. The Prime Minister will be in New York on a taxpayer funded trip to get some personal goody, yet he will not even travel across town to speak to the United Nations. World leaders are gathering this week to discuss the world's most pressing issues, but our Prime Minister will not be there.

Does the minister understand that foreign affairs is about doing the hard work of engaging the world? It is not about making the Prime Minister feel special.

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister will be in New York. He will be meeting with a number of colleagues to discuss the important issues of the day. He will also be accepting the World Statesman of the Year award by a very well-respected group.

Every Canadian can be proud of the principled foreign policy and the leadership of our Prime Minister.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I guess the Prime Minister expects our new roommate, the British prime minister, to do the speech on his behalf. It is kind of like the policy announcements being leaked by the U.K. on its behalf.

Parliament must review this deal, not just for the details but for the message we are sending the rest of the world when we have the Union Jack and the Maple Leaf flying side by side. When will the Conservatives bring this deal before Parliament?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is what we are doing. In Haiti, the United Kingdom will house one of its diplomats and development workers with us. In Rangoon, we will house one of our diplomats and tradespeople with them. It is just about sharing resources in a small number of countries. This is nothing new.

I do find it passing strange that the critic for the NDP seems to be encouraging us to have vibrant diplomacy with Iran, but is somehow scared of us having diplomacy with the United Kingdom.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I hope the Prime Minister can pick up the "fossil of the year" awards that are still waiting to be claimed by the government.

If the Prime Minister agrees with Governor Carney that income inequality is indeed a problem, could he explain why the government is still clawing back part-time benefits for those on employment insurance? Why is the government raising employment insurance taxes? Why is the government continuing to discriminate against low-income families who do not qualify for tax refunds?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government takes tackling income inequality very seriously, which is why the government has brought in a number of important measures: the working income tax benefit; enhancements to the universal child care benefit; enhancements to national child benefits; the tax break for the GST to low-income people; the increase in the guaranteed income supplement for poor senior citizens. The real question is why the Liberal Party votes against all of these things.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the real question is: why did government members vote against undertaking a study on family inequality at the Standing Committee on Finance? The Prime Minister and his colleagues voted against it.

Oral Questions

The fact is that the government is refusing to acknowledge that the challenge of our times is to ensure that Canada's wealth is shared fairly by everyone and that no one is excluded.

Why vote against that?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party prefers to conduct studies; on this side of the House, we prefer to take action. That is the major difference.

We have done important things: a GST reduction for the poor, benefits for workers on social assistance, higher GIS benefits, and so forth.

In any event, when we help the most vulnerable and the poor, the Liberal party votes against these measures.

* * *

[English]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, now that the Minister of Immigration and the Minister of Foreign Affairs have said that the establishment of gay rights around the world is a priority for the Canadian government, could the Prime Minister tell us if this now means the Government of Canada will provide the necessary financial support for the celebration of gay rights in Canada, in large cities right across the country, every summer that they take place and can we assume he and his ministers will join members of the Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party across the country in celebrating gay rights here at home?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government advances human rights for all people, not just in Canada but internationally. One of the initiatives of this government that I am particularly proud of is the establishment of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg. I hope some day we will have the support of the Liberal Party for that.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, employment insurance reform is giving rise to anomalies that only the Conservatives can understand.

A man from Carleton was offered a job in Gaspé. Gaspé, of course, is three and a half hours from Carleton. In another example, a man from the Îles-de-la-Madeleine was offered a job in Bonaventure, on the Gaspé Peninsula. That is a twelve-hour trip, including a \$50 ferry ride.

In light of this information, does the minister still believe that the definition of "suitable employment" is appropriate?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our objectives and priorities are job creation, economic growth and long-term prosperity. This requires workers with the necessary skills and jobs available for them.

We are working to help the unemployed find jobs in their regions that match their skills, in order to make life better for them and for their families.

[English]

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the parliamentary secretary falsely stated "those who work more will be able to keep more". She knows that is not true. Grocery store clerks working a few hours a week have 50¢ of every dollar clawed back from their EI. Everyone making less than \$300 will be worse off under this new scheme.

The minister needs to come clean. Is she deliberately misleading Canadians, or is she simply not on top of her file?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the old system actually clawed back dollar for dollar anything—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Minister of Human Resources has the floor.

• (1430)

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Speaker, if people made more than \$75 a week, 40% of their claim, they got clawed back dollar for dollar for everything they earned beyond that while they were on claim. That discouraged people from working.

We want to ensure that people are encouraged to work and when they do work, they will always be better off than when they do not.

[Translation]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would really like her to stop with the tall tales. But let us move on.

Let us take another example: the cultural and tourist sites that have to close in the winter. Not all the inns, restaurants and museums in the Gaspé can stay open in the winter because there are no tourists. Thousands of my constituents make their living from tourism. They need employment insurance. The program is essential to the survival of seasonal industries.

With their reform, the Conservatives are jeopardizing these jobs. Why are they attacking the economy of our regions?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have supported seasonal industries to a much greater extent than any other government.

The right to employment insurance also brings with it the responsibility to look for work. If there are no jobs in the region that match people's skills, employment insurance will be there for them, as always.

*Oral Questions***FOREIGN INVESTMENT**

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, all regions of the country are paying the price for the Conservatives' choices. It could be more of the same if the Nexen takeover goes forward. State-owned Chinese company CNOOC, which wants to purchase the Canadian company Nexen, is run by Wang Yilin, who has said that drilling rigs were national territory and a strategic weapon.

Yet the Conservatives refuse to hold a public review of this plan. Is the Minister of Industry concerned about these comments? Why are they refusing to hold a comprehensive review?

[English]

Hon. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government will always act in the best interests of Canadians. This transaction will be scrutinized very closely. If the hon. member wants to check out section 20 of the Investment Canada Act, she can do so. It clearly enumerates the six criteria for net benefit and that will be the criteria used to evaluate any decision.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are 18 days left on Nexen and the minister still refuses to respond to Canadians' concerns, including the following. CNOOC's chair was nominated in 2011 by the secretive organization department, confirmed by the Politburo and announced by the central committee. He was also named party secretary for CNOOC at that time.

Does the minister see CNOOC's relation as independent from the state, or will he now admit that Canadians, including many in his own caucus, have legitimate concerns and agree to hold public consultations?

Hon. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, the government will always act in the best interests of Canadians. This transaction will be scrutinized very closely.

The Investment Canada Act process has provisions to protect national security. I remind the hon. member that when we introduced the national security provisions in section 25 in 2009, the NDP voted against them.

* * *

FOOD SAFETY

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the handling of the XL Foods meat E. coli outbreak is the latest example of what is wrong with the Conservatives' dangerous changes to CFIA.

Hundreds of potentially E. coli contaminated beef products were shipped to every province destined for families' dinner plates. From the very first detection of E. coli, CFIA waited two weeks to issue a recall. This spring the minister said, "The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is not making any changes that would in any way place food safety at risk". That claim is a joke.

Why did the Conservatives gut regulations and put Canadian families at risk?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker,

none of that is true. The safety of Canadian food is a top priority for this government.

The CFIA initiated a hold on the original product in question, all of it, on September 4, the day E. coli was discovered. None of it made it to store shelves. The recall is ongoing.

The work with the CFIA to adjudicate the paperwork at XL Foods is being done so that it can start getting back into that lucrative American market just as quickly as possible.

[Translation]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives do not like to talk to Canadians about the consequences of their decisions.

When the Canadian Food Inspection Agency discovered that beef from an Alberta plant was potentially contaminated, what happened? It took two weeks to sound the alarm, and we just learned that this product is banned in the United States. That is unbelievable. Consumers across the country were affected by this belated recall. People are worried. We cannot play games with their safety.

Will the Conservatives reconsider making cuts to food safety?

• (1435)

[English]

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have done exactly the opposite. We have put hundreds of millions of dollars and hundreds of front-line inspectors to work at CFIA to ensure that this type of thing can be handled when it happens. We have done exactly that.

The people at CFIA have done an exemplary job. We are in a day-to-day conversation with them on the status of this recall and on the work forward to get back into that lucrative American market.

I reiterate that none of the product made it to store shelves and no illnesses have been linked back to this particular strain of E. coli. We have actually done a tremendous job.

It is unfortunate that the NDP consistently vote against the funding and manpower for CFIA.

* * *

[Translation]

CENSUS

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, hiding information about the effects of cuts to services has become a Conservative hallmark. Statistics Canada has given us the proof today. The Conservatives swore that abolishing the long form census would not have any effect on data. But we now know that the complete opposite is true: 12% of municipalities had response rates lower than 50%.

Oral Questions

Does the Conservative government realize that its stubbornness has seriously compromised our ability to make informed, fact-based decisions regarding municipal development?

[*English*]

Hon. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Statistics Canada has posted the final response rates from the 2011 national household survey at the national, provincial, territorial and local levels. The final response rate for the national household survey was 78.3% nationally. This is comparable to response rates from other voluntary surveys conducted by Statistics Canada.

Statistics Canada is continuing its data quality assessment of the data from the national household survey and will make the results available as the work is completed. The first results from the national household survey will be available in May 2013.

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister has been talking out of both sides of his mouth.

Last February, the then industry minister bragged to this House about the high response rate to the national household survey stating, "...indications are very promising with the response rate for both the short form census and the national household survey".

In reality, 12% of communities have response rates below 50%; statistical evidence of the government's failure.

What will the Conservatives do to correct the glaring problem with the collection of this information?

Hon. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I already answered that question.

The member was not in the House when we had this debate in the last Parliament as he had not been elected yet. However, if he had been here he would remember that we said that we would not threaten Canadians with jail time because they did not want to tell the government what their religion was. We also said that we would not threaten them with jail time because they did not want to tell the government how many bedrooms they had in their house or how many hours of housework they did.

The government will never do that. Maybe the opposition would but this government would not.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was asked to bring this story to the House.

Her name is Louise. She is a single mother of two and she receives EI benefits. Last year, she received a golden opportunity. She could work two days a week as a receptionist and keep her EI benefits. As well, she could also keep that part-time salary. Finally, Louise was moving forward for her and her kids.

Now the Conservatives have this new rule where the first dollar she earns on her job will get clawed back.

I have a question, through you, Mr. Speaker, from Louise to the minister. When things were getting better, why did the Conservatives make it worse?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the case of Louise, if she had worked one extra hour beyond those two days that would have been clawed back 100%.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The member for Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte needs to come to order. The hon. Minister of Human Resources has the floor.

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Speaker, under the new system she would get to keep 50¢ on the dollar if she worked day three and if she worked day four.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: She was getting a hundred.

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. minister is answering the question and we will not have another interruption.

The hon. Minister of Human Resources.

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Speaker, Louise would have been better off with the new system. She got to work day three and day four. Before she would have had every dollar clawed back.

We are ensuring that when Canadians work they are better off than when they do not.

* * *

• (1440)

[*Translation*]

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, students are racking up more debt than ever before.

With the youth unemployment rate approaching 15%, young people have a hard time paying back their student loans. The interest on these loans can easily add \$5,000 to their debt burden.

Will the government do as some provinces—Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador and Ontario, for example—have done and reduce the federal interest rate on student loans?

[*English*]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is ironic that the Liberals are trying to actually help students when they voted against everything we have done to give them more grants so that they do not have to repay them and do not have to worry about interest rates. In fact, we are helping twice as many students, almost 300,000, with our Canada student grants, as did the Liberals.

However, when we brought in supports to help with the repayment of student loans, the Liberals did not support that. There are so many things, including summer employment for students, that the Liberals keep voting against.

We are helping students afford their education.

*Oral Questions***PENSIONS**

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, and they voted against all of our amendments to that fact.

After creating the OAS to fight seniors' poverty, Prime Minister Pearson lowered the eligibility age to 65 to combat seniors' income inequality. The Conservatives opposed the move then and, by turning back the clock on pension security, today's Conservatives are promising to show tomorrow's seniors a new hardship

Tearing down is the Prime Minister's mantra and, as the cuts continue, more Canadians will feel the pinch.

Given the haze of nostalgia, I wonder just what other social programs the PM plans to bring back to pre-1970 levels.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we did was raise seniors' incomes. We raised the amount they can earn without having their guaranteed income supplement reduced from \$500 to \$3,500 so they could have more money in their pockets. We also increased the age exemption, not once but twice. We brought in pension income sharing for seniors.

There are two things in common: one, we introduced those and brought them in for Canadians; and two, the Liberals voted against them.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the F-35 file is not the only one showcasing the Conservatives' incompetence.

The National Defence and Canadian Forces Ombudsman has issued a second report on the delivery of care for Canadian Forces members suffering from operational stress injuries.

The report points to a chronic lack of care available to affected military personnel. Instead of acting on the ombudsman's recommendations, the Minister of National Defence is questioning his mandate.

Why is the government playing political games at the expense of military personnel with post-traumatic stress disorder?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. We have just introduced additional supports for members of the Canadian Forces suffering from post-traumatic stress. We have made a concerted effort during our time in office to hire more mental health professionals and make them available to those suffering from post-traumatic stress.

The ombudsman's report actually noted those progressive moves that we have made and lauded the government for those efforts.

I continue to have faith in the process as we continue to work with psychiatrists, mental health professionals and chaplains across the country to ensure that those ill and injured soldiers receive the best support possible.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, despite some progress, the ombudsman continues to find problems with the government's handling of post-traumatic stress disorder in the military. There is chronic understaffing, long waits for treatment, continued stigmatization and fear of coming forward, and specific failures to meet individual needs and treat fairly those suffering from PTSD.

What no one understands is why the minister is so focused on challenging the ombudsman for doing his job instead of doing his own job and working to solve these problems.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again the member is wrong. It is the usual rhetoric from that individual.

We have continually throughout our time in office made more investments into the mental health professionals who we have in the employ of the Canadian Forces. We continue to work with professional associations. We continue to work with the soldiers themselves, like the Be the Difference campaign led by the Chief of Defence Staff, Walt Natynczyk, that was meant to de-stigmatize any recognition of a mental health illness suffered from deployment or otherwise.

Yes, there will always be more to do. Yes, we are tremendously indebted to those who have put their lives on the line for our country. We continue to work to improve them.

* * *

●(1445)

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the New Democrats do not just say that we are pro-choice, we actually are. This is not an issue of conscience. It is an issue of women's rights and women's rights are human rights and they are not up for debate.

The Supreme Court was clear decades ago. Canadians have moved on. However, cabinet ministers in the Conservative government do not agree.

While some months ago the government whip made a moving speech in defence of a woman's right to choose, why is he standing by while members of his cabinet are willing to vote against Canadian women?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, private members' business is private members' business and the motion will be dealt with according to the rules of the House of Commons. That is as it should be.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on the campaign trail, the Conservatives promised not to reopen the abortion debate but guess what? We are debating abortion.

[Translation]

The NDP is proud to be the only federal party with a clear position on abortion. Women have the right to choose.

Oral Questions

Should women's existing rights be up for debate in Parliament? Can Parliament take away any of those rights? The NDP says no.

Can the ministers who plan to vote in favour of Motion M-312 explain to us why they think it is a good idea to take away Canadian women's basic rights?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member should be aware of the rules of the House. Private members can come forward with resolutions. The resolution in question will be dealt with according to the rules of the House of Commons. Why is that so upsetting to the hon. member?

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the isolationist NDP, which consistently opposes trade agreements with other global neighbours, would close off Canada and Canadian products from the rest of the world, our Conservative government believes in increasing exports and increasing jobs in Canada.

The NDP's anti-trade and high tax policies, like its tax on everything carbon tax, would be disastrous for the Canadian economy

Could the Minister of State for Finance tell us how increased trade benefits the Canadian economy and helps to fuel job creation?

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance today gave a major speech promoting our government's commitment to increasing Canada's exports to the Asia Pacific and why that is so critical to industries in Canada to help create jobs and to level the playing field to allow our Canadian companies to compete. We on this side of the House know how important that is to Canadian businesses.

What is incredible is the fact that our strong, stable majority government keeps promoting trade but every time we put forward a new trade agreement the NDP votes against that.

* * *

[Translation]

PRIVACY

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Facebook users across Canada became very concerned when they learned that their private posts could now show up on their public wall. This breach of privacy is a problem that is not limited to Facebook. The longer the government waits, the worse the situation will become.

We are in the 21st century. When will the Conservatives finally update our laws to resolve privacy issues on the Internet?

[English]

Hon. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government introduced Bill C-12, which is an important tool for ensuring a stronger digital economy in Canada. We look forward to the oppositions' support in moving that forward.

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-12 is already out of date. The government is still stuck in a world of eight-track tapes.

This Facebook privacy concern is a concern to millions of Canadians, but the issue is bigger than that.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville has the floor. Order.

The hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville.

Ms. Charmaine Borg: Mr. Speaker, yes, I do know what an eight-track tape is.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1450)

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville.

Ms. Charmaine Borg: Mr. Speaker, the Privacy Commissioner just released new research raising concerns about popular websites disclosing personal information to third parties without consent. If government members need help understanding Facebook, I am happy to lend a hand.

We need a modern approach to digital issues. When will the government take serious steps to address the serious privacy concerns of Canadians?

Hon. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the hon. member has a grandmother or grandfather who shared information about eight-track tapes with her. I could tell her a thing or two about LPs, which is something from my time.

Canadians have given our government a strong mandate to stay focused on what matters, creating jobs and economic growth. Ensuring trust and confidence through the protection of personal information is essential to the growth of the digital economy. Our government will continue to help protect consumers and businesses from misuse of their personal information. We urge the opposition to join us in that.

* * *

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a fundamental principle of democratic accountability is protecting the privacy of the individual while ensuring the transparency of the state. Unfortunately, the Conservatives have flipped that principle upside down.

Since signing the Federal Accountability Act, Canada has fallen to 51st in the world when it comes to access to information. Citizens in Niger and Angola have better rights for access to information.

Oral Questions

Here is a simple question. What is the government afraid of? Why did it sign the Federal Accountability Act? Why did it turn its back on the rights of Canadians to transparent government?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have some good statistics for the hon. member and for the House.

The Government of Canada, in 2010-11, for that year measured, received 41,641 new access to information requests. That is over 15% more than the previous year. The volume has increased by almost 50% since 2005. More than 90% of the requests are processed within the government's 120-day standard.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, then why is the Parliamentary Budget Officer taking the hon. member to court for basic information for parliamentarians?

The Conservatives ran on a promise of accountability and they broke that promise. There is no greater example than the hon. member himself, who ran a \$50 million slush fund through his office and buried the documents. I am sorry, but his talk about open government has all the credibility of a flim-flam salesman at some country carnival.

The Conservatives ran on a promise of making government more accountable. Why did they break that promise?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know what the hon. member is actually talking about.

I can say that when it comes to open data, there are over 272,000 data sets online right now at data.gc.ca, where all citizens can access that data, can use it to create new apps for mobile phones, can use it to help their business or their personal lives.

That is what we do. We give data to the people of Canada because it is their data.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week the military ombudsman presented a thoughtful, balanced report on the mental health of our men and women in uniform. Even this, however, was too much for the Minister of National Defence, who slapped down the ombudsman for his "advocacy".

It is clear that any officer of Parliament, be it the PBO or the Auditor General, and now the military ombudsman, who crosses the Conservative propaganda machine will be destroyed. If the ombudsman cannot, and if the minister will not, who will stand up for our troops?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, you are looking at him.

I will tell the House, I am so proud of the support our government has provided for our men and women in uniform, \$1 billion annually to address all the needs across the Canada first defence strategy.

With respect to the ombudsman, he was very supportive in his remarks that he made about our changes. He said, "we're very, very pleased to see that there's a strong commitment from the minister and the senior leadership, and as a matter of fact, to address this shortfall and to bring more care providers on the front line".

That is a glowing endorsement from the ombudsman, whom the hon. member seems to be trying to defend.

* * *

CENSUS

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Liberals repeatedly warned the government that the cancellation of the mandatory long form census would cause the participation rate to plummet.

Now we know that it has fallen by over 25% and that 1 in 10 communities will not reach the 50% level necessary for them to have data that they can use to plan their communities. Most of these are the small and rural communities.

Why does the government continue to form policy based on ideology instead of evidence?

• (1455)

Hon. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member refers to ideology, and again I will say that this government does not hold the ideology that people should be threatened with jail time because they do not want to tell the government what their religion is.

We do not believe that people should be threatened with jail time because they do not want to say how many hours of housework they did or how much time they spent with their kids.

As I said before, Statistics Canada is continuing its data quality assessment of the data from the national household survey and will make the results available as this work is completed.

* * *

[Translation]

SPORT

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, young Canadians are increasingly sedentary and have significant health problems. According to Statistics Canada, almost 1.6 million young people are obese.

Instead of looking for solutions, the minister is content to congratulate his government in this House for its dismal record and to be photographed while learning to curl.

When will Canadians have a real sports policy that will help them adopt an active lifestyle?

[English]

Hon. Bal Gosal (Minister of State (Sport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, keeping Canadians active and involved in sports leads to healthier, happier lifestyles.

That is why our government is working hard to provide families and children with opportunities to take part in physical activity. We created a children's fitness tax credit and continue to work closely with partners like ParticipACTION, le Grand défi and the provinces and territories to make sure Canadians stay active and healthy.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, no matter how hard the minister sweeps, this problem is not going away. Tax credits are nothing but burned stones to those who cannot even afford sports for their kids in the first place.

The fact is that young Canadians are less and less active and are suffering the consequences of obesity and being overweight.

Will the minister hurry hard and commit to working with provinces and municipalities to improve access to sports and the necessary infrastructure?

Hon. Bal Gosal (Minister of State (Sport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, despite the opinion of the opposition, our government's support towards increasing physical activity among Canadians is welcomed and working.

As stated by Kelly Murumets, CEO of ParticipACTION, "We are delighted with the Government of Canada's commitment to ParticipACTION and we applaud their support for the promotion of physical activity and healthy living".

For example, sport in Canada saw 900,000 Canadians taking part in sport and recreation events in 425 different communities across the country.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today a lawsuit is being filed by a former prisoner claiming that the Government of Canada violated his human rights by not providing him with clean needles to inject illegal substances while he is in prison.

My constituents are concerned not only that convicted violent prisoners are doing drugs but that they want to have their needles paid for by the Canadian taxpayers.

Can the Minister of Public Safety please comment on whether he will establish a needle exchange program for prisoners and what he is doing to stop illegal drugs in our prisons?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while I cannot comment on a specific case before the courts, I can say that our government is committed to developing a correctional system that actually corrects criminal behaviour.

Our government has a zero tolerance policy for drugs in our institutions. That is why we made a commitment during the last election to develop drug-free prisons. Drug use among prisoners dramatically reduces their chances of successful rehabilitation.

* * *

FOOD SAFETY

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just last night Conservatives were celebrating cuts to CFIA and hundreds of staff affected by their budget.

Oral Questions

It turns out our food safety agency waited two weeks to issue a notice about beef contaminated with E. coli from XL Foods, and only finally issued it after American inspectors caught it.

We warned that Conservative cuts to food inspection would leave us dangerously exposed. Clearly it was not just backroom administrative cuts.

I ask the minister this. Who is responsible for our food safety now that his cuts have removed vital inspectors? Is it the Americans, or XL Foods?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said in reply to the ill-informed NDP member, the CFIA captured the affected food the day the E. coli was found, on September 4. They did that; they put a rope around it and held onto it.

To build on that, they had an enhanced recall, a voluntary recall with XL Foods in mid-September to get any type of cross-contamination from other lines that went through the plant. They did that voluntarily. They did that to ensure the Canadian food supply is safe.

They are able to do that because we put hundreds of millions of dollars and hundreds of inspectors back on the front line after the decade adrift under that party.

* * *

● (1500)

[Translation]

HOUSING

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, everything is a matter of economic effectiveness for the Conservatives. But when it comes to social housing, they are doing everything to be ineffective.

The various levels of government spend at least \$4.5 billion for homelessness-related health care, police and prison services. According to a recent study, the federal government could save 54% of that money by helping the homeless have better housing. The facts are clear: investing these savings could help fight poverty and homelessness.

Will the minister finally admit it and commit to providing stable funding for social housing?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we are doing. We have signed five-year agreements with the provinces and territories for very substantial sums to fight homelessness in Canada. We are responsible for creating 600,000 affordable housing units.

[English]

Unfortunately, the NDP voted against helping all of those Canadians in need.

*Oral Questions***THE ECONOMY**

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thanks to our economic action plan, we have the fastest growing economy in the G7. In fact, just today, Statistics Canada announced that retail sales rose in July, beating all forecasts.

However, the economic recovery remains fragile and cannot withstand the dangerous economic experiments proposed by the NDP.

I am wondering if the minister could please update this House as to how the imposition of a new tax could hurt Canadian families and the economic recovery.

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government's economic action plan is working, but while we are working to protect Canada's economic recovery, the opposition is advocating a carbon tax.

Let us be clear. While the NDP is in denial about it, it is written in black and white on page 4 of its costing document. It talks about taking \$21 billion straight out of the fragile Canadian economy and dumping it into the government coffers.

Of course, it is middle class families that will pay.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Thunder Bay Marine Communications and Traffic Services Centre that monitors Lake Superior, the St. Mary's River and the north shore of Lake Huron will close in 2014. Fewer operators, farther away, will be answering almost 400 more calls.

How can the government forget tragedies like the *Edmund Fitzgerald*?

[*Translation*]

This closure will lead to even more disasters on our Great Lakes.

Why are Conservatives making reckless cuts to essential services in northern Ontario? Why are they weakening marine safety?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth.

Technology has evolved over the last number of years, and our government is investing in the Coast Guard's infrastructure to take advantage of today's technology to deliver the same services from larger centres at strategic locations across the country.

Better connected centres equipped with modern technology will ensure improved reliability of service.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the chair of the board of the National Battlefields

Commission has just dropped a bomb, so to speak, in Quebec City, by threatening to drastically reduce the number of major events on the Plains of Abraham. This senseless decision will have serious consequences for the success of Quebec City, for its tourism and for the economy of the entire region. As Mayor Labeaume said, the Plains of Abraham are part of the city and part of its life.

Does the government support the ill-considered decision of the National Battlefields Commission, or is it going to take steps to protect the vitality of our national capital's culture and tourism?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are currently in discussions with Quebec City and the National Battlefields Commission in order to come up with a formula, a process to protect Quebec City's great cultural community and the heritage of that structure and area that is so special for Canada.

* * *

[*English*]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of astronaut Chris Hadfield.

• (1505)

[*Translation*]

Retired Colonel Hadfield is a Canadian astronaut who will be going into space for a third time in December.

[*English*]

He is scheduled to spend six months on the space station and in the second half of the mission he will take command, which will make him the first Canadian commander of the International Space Station.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know that my colleague from Souris—Moose Mountain wants to make a statement to the House. We all shared his concern before question period. Perhaps he could fill us in now on the news from Saskatchewan.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the House that the fire at the Rocanville mine has been put out. The miners are safe. We trust that they will be rescued soon and will be at home with their loved ones.

The Speaker: I am sure the House appreciates the good news.

*Business of Supply***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**

OPPOSITION MOTION—INCOME INEQUALITY

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: When question period started the hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor had questions and comments left.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question that the member asked earlier today in question period. I am wondering if maybe he could incorporate that question into the motion that the Liberal Party put forward this opposition day.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yes indeed. It was interesting that after question period, I received a message from my office, but I will first set up the question if members did not get to hear it.

Her name is Louise. She lives in my riding. She is the single mom of two. She was able to achieve a job for two days a week as a receptionist, and because of the rules under the old system she was allowed to earn up to 40%. She was allowed to keep her benefits and at the same time to keep the money from part-time work. So finally Louise was able to move ahead. I asked the minister why these new rules would claw back 50¢ on the first dollar that she makes. Basically she is going to earn less. The minister stood in the House and said that is not the case. She is actually going to earn more.

The question that came from the riding is why is she making \$100 less every two weeks in EI benefits than she was last year? Am I missing something here?

In the United States, Bill Clinton talked about that key word “arithmetic”, which sometimes escapes us here. I do not quite understand. As my colleague from Cape Breton pointed out, the paycheque does not lie. She makes \$100 less.

Again, I would ask the government this: When things were getting better for her, why did it then make them worse for her?

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member would know, EI is a program based on a percentage of income. There are a whole number of variables that can lead to different amounts of money being received.

I will ask the member a more basic question. He brought this up at the end of his speech when he started talking about U.S. politics and the 47%. He was rambling on about things that really do not apply to Canada. The Liberal Party has brought this motion forward today to talk about income inequality. I am curious that if the member has seen virtue in so many of the programs that we have brought forward, why has he consistently voted against these measures? Specifically with respect to EI, why does the member not recognize that the EI system today is encouraging and supporting people in a fashion it never did under the Liberal Party?

● (1510)

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, what part of the fact that she is making less than she did under the last program does he not get? Can I keep using that word “arithmetic” again? I stand up and say arithmetic escapes us and all of a sudden someone stands up and defies the logic of arithmetic once again.

Why did I vote against them? It was because they do not work. Why? It is because Louise told me so.

[Translation]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was present when my colleague made his speech before question period. I was quite interested in the motion, but I only had time to read it quickly, unfortunately. I was especially interested in the last point. I wonder if he could elaborate a little more on this point:

(e) removing interest charges from the federal component of student loans.

Since I was a student not too long ago and since a number of my colleagues are worried about loans to young students, I wonder if he could go into a little more detail on this.

[English]

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, I would wholeheartedly like to thank my colleague.

[Translation]

I thank my colleague very much; she is too kind.

[English]

I did not get to that part of my speech as I had limited time before question period. That is a very essential point. I talked about students under the guise of youth unemployment, but when there is youth unemployment it becomes that much more difficult to pay off student loans with high interest charges. We have to look at that by zeroing in and targeting that particular expense, which is an impediment to people buying first-time homes, first-time cars and students being able to get their first job.

More can be done on that account. There were many policies in the past that should be looked at and resurrected so that students can get a break on tuition while in school. At the same time, the interest charges have become crippling, as my colleague has recognized.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague made an excellent presentation and put out some examples of the issues that affected his constituents. I think quite often that is when people can really relate. Paycheques do not lie. If person is receiving \$100 less today than he or she did a year ago then, clearly, the changes the Conservatives are making under the premise that they are helping people certainly are not helping that group of people. I guess they refer to them as “those people”.

I am very pleased to have an opportunity to speak today about a very important motion, our opposition day motion on income inequality. What that means, quite simply, is the difference between those who have and those who do not have. The Liberals have always tried to eliminate that, so everybody has to some degree. Some have more, some have less, but we do not have the difference between those who have next to nothing and the others who continue to get richer.

Business of Supply

The motion is important because it urges parliamentarians to consider the kind of Canada we all want. Do we, as parliamentarians, want a country where only the strong survive, or a country where we all work together to build and maintain communities where everyone has an equal place? I have a hard time believing that is not a goal of all parliamentarians, regardless of their party flavour.

The motion today calls upon the government to take several simple and immediate steps to reduce the growing income inequality in Canada. The measures are simple things. They are not complex and they are not going to cost millions of dollars. They include a rollback on the employment insurance premium hikes, which inflict a relatively higher burden, again, on low to modest-income workers, and end the punitive new clawback from employment insurance that are clearly discouraging people from working.

I think the goal of us all is to have those who are on employment insurance working a few extra days or a few extra hours because maybe it will lead to a full-time job, eventually. It improves their skill sets and provides more opportunities for them.

Another measure is to make tax credits, such as the family caregiver tax credit, refundable. It makes no sense giving tax credits if the only people who will benefit are those in the high-income bracket. We are talking about many people in the lower-income bracket who need these, but they are of absolutely no use because they do not make enough money.

Another measure is to make the registered disability savings plan available to sufferers of serious chronic diseases, such as multiple sclerosis. My colleague from Etobicoke North has done a huge amount of work on the whole issue of MS. We have heard from many of them in the House and the difficulties they face. I use MS as one of the chronic disease. Let us make the registered disability savings plan available to them as well.

Interest from federal students loans should be removed. We hear from students all across Canada about the massive amount of student debt they carry. Why can we not forgo the interest as a good measure? It is not going to be millions of dollars. A lot of it gets written off because the students cannot find jobs. Why not do the right thing and eliminate it?

We are calling upon the government to set aside its “might is right” agenda just for a moment. Let us seriously look at this whole income inequality issue. We ask the government to vote for our opposition day motion and help those who are unemployed as well as employers, those who are in the lowest income bracket, the elderly, families, the disabled, those suffering from chronic diseases and those students who are struggling to get their education.

This motion is about helping those who sometimes fall between the cracks, and we all know of many of them.

In simple terms, in a country like Canada, it is unacceptable that these people would be subjected to the poverty and squalor and the suffering out there. Not everybody is happy. Not everybody is doing really well and has two or three cars. There is a lot of suffering and struggling out there.

As parliamentarians, we can, and we must, do more to help those who struggle to make ends meet. Who knows what a difference these small measures might make in the lives of many who need the most.

For example, last night my office received a call from a man in southern Ontario named Dan. Dan came to Canada with his family 47 years ago, with absolutely nothing in his pockets, like many new immigrants.

● (1515)

Over the years, Dan and his family struggled, had two jobs, three sometimes and they often had difficulty making ends meet. However, they were able to access a variety of government programming and supports when it was available. As a result of their work and an occasional hand up, today Dan is the CEO of a successful and growing multimedia business.

If those programs had not been available, where would Dan be today? Dan would probably be still living on welfare and who knows the impact that would have had on his quality of life, on his family and on his children. Today Dan gives back to his community by operating a food bank and by helping, on a voluntary basis, other fledgling businesses to grow because he had a hand up, not a handout. He is a father and a grandfather and he has helped other members of his family to grow and expand in their own lives. That was a great investment in Dan.

Who would have been better off had we as a country opted not to help Dan? Sadly, I remember when the Prime Minister said these words, and I shuddered thinking surely he would never get a majority, he would never have that opportunity. Well that day is here. The Prime Minister once said that if he was given a chance, he would change the face of Canada forever. Step by step, that is exactly what is happening. Even though only 39% of Canadians voted for him, he has the votes to do whatever he wants in the House.

Many of the programs that once helped people like Dan have fallen by the wayside under the watch of the government. I referred to them in question period. Leaving people behind seems to be an emerging policy of the current government. Inflation is driving up the price of everything from education to groceries to home heating. With median family income stagnating or declining, Canadians are being hit from both sides.

However, instead of taking the steps to reduce income inequality, the government is sticking its head in the sand by refusing a committee to do a study on it. Let us look into the issue of what is happening. We hear “income inequality” used a lot. To get an understanding of what it was, we tried to do that through the good work of our finance critic at committee and that was voted down because the government would rather stick its head in the sand and ignore these kinds of issues than truly move forward.

Business of Supply

Earlier today, the member for Wellington—Halton Hills asked what these measures would cost. The bigger question is, what is the cost of doing nothing? If nobody did anything, Dan would not be where he is today as a very successful business person, helping other people. If we can find billions of dollars for new fighter jets, for high-priced orange juice and for fake lakes, why can we not find a few bucks for someone who is struggling with MS or a student struggling with high tuition? It is all about priorities.

Liberal priorities are people. For me, this debate shows the philosophical difference between Liberals and Conservatives. Whether we are referencing the old age pensions delivered by Mackenzie King's government, or the Old Age Security Act delivered by the Louis St. Laurent government or the Canadian pension plan and guaranteed income supplement, both delivered by Lester Pearson, all of these were delivered by the Liberal Party of Canada, while we continued on a fiscally responsible government and left a \$14 billion surplus in the bank for the Conservatives when they came into power. Surely we can find some common ground on this issue. It does not have to be an issue of Conservative versus NDP versus Liberal. It is something that we could all vote for. Let us look into it because it affects all of our families.

The parliamentary secretary admitted today that poverty was still a problem in Canada, and I agree with her. However, when one finds oneself in a hole, why would one continue to dig down further and further? Why not say, "Yes, we have these issues but let us work together with all parliamentarians to make that difference?" The cost of inaction is very high and blaming people is not the way to go. Let us all vote for the motion and move forward Canada's agenda.

• (1520)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the fact that the Liberals are concerned, and I would argue all members in the House are concerned with those less fortunate in their communities. We would all like to see them do better and we would all like to see better outcomes for each and every person in our riding. We may have different ideas and philosophies about how to make that happen, but it is very difficult to encourage across the aisle dialogue and co-operation on these issues when those members impugn the motives of the government and members on this side by suggesting that our priorities are something other than what they are.

The government has indicated that it is focused on the economy, on jobs and on creating opportunity for Canadians. The Liberals may disagree with how we have gone about that, but the results speak for themselves. If the members opposite would like to see co-operation across the aisle, I would encourage them that we cannot seek to impugn the motives of each and every member of the House who all want to see better outcomes for their constituents.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, it is all about how we get there. It is all about investing in jobs and the economy. However, the bottom line seems to be to lower taxes because somehow that will create jobs.

I think every Canadian wants a job. When people do not work, they do not feel fulfilled. There are so many other things that happen as a result of unemployment. The idea is this. What else do we need

to do to ensure we are creating jobs? It is not just about lowering taxes.

My comments were not disparaging. My comments show that the government does not seem to recognize that while it may have its own agenda, and that is the economy, the economy is on everybody's agenda. The economy helps to produce a strong country. We can be fiscally responsible, but we can also be socially responsible at the same time.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech and her party for the motion it moved in the House today. The motion seems very interesting.

I took my time reading the motion, particularly the following point:

(c) making tax credits, such as the Family Caregiver Tax Credit, refundable so that low income Canadians are not excluded;

I think this is an extremely important point in the motion. There are a lot of family caregivers, and the number will grow as Canada's population ages.

Does my colleague not think it important to adopt this motion, especially that part, to ensure that the tax credits are refundable for low-income families? Does she not think it sad that the Conservatives want to vote against that part of the motion?

• (1525)

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, on the issue of caregivers and their struggles, all of us know of several, if not hundreds, of people who care for a sick family member. Giving them a caregiver tax credit sounds great, but if it is not fully refundable, it does not help the very people we are talking about today. They have taken time off from their jobs, or quit or put an end to their careers so they can take care of a sick family member.

There is clearly much more to be done. This is one step in that direction, but we want it to be refundable so it truly helps everybody who needs it.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member was a minister of government when the Liberals were in government. Could she comment on the Kelowna accord and how agreements between different stakeholders can assist in bringing more equity among all people if governments work together to achieve things like the Kelowna accord?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member referenced the Kelowna accord. There was also the child care agreement that was within three months of being finalized. Unfortunately, the NDP voted against that and we lost one of the most progressive social programs we could have.

The Kelowna accord is another example of the kinds of programs that can be worked on together and the kinds of policies that can come out when everybody works together, but that means truly listening.

Business of Supply

I go back to the comment from my Conservative colleague. I think he was quite sincere in his intent to move forward and to try to help many of these families out. I think a positive result today on something as important as income inequality, by having all of us vote for it, could maybe be a start in the right direction. Then maybe tomorrow there would be less rhetoric in the House and a little more of an ambience of actually working together on something.

Ms. Eve Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

I am pleased to speak to the motion from the interim leader of the third party.

When addressing the topic of income inequality, I had hoped he had researched what has happened to the level of poverty in Canada under our Conservative government.

Under our Conservative government, poverty has decreased to an all-time low. In fact, it was in 1996, under the previous Liberal government, that Canada's poverty rate reached its highest level in more than 40 years. What an abysmal record.

Under the Liberals, Canada's poverty rate hit 15.2%. In 2010, as the world economy continued to struggle and Canada continued to show leadership on the world stage under our Prime Minister, with a strong, stable, national majority Conservative government, 9% of Canada's population lived in poverty. This number was still too high so we have continued to act to reduce it. This number represents the lowest percentage in Canadian history. In fact, it is 32% lower than under the Liberals. To put it in context, 1.3 million Canadians under the Conservative government have escaped poverty.

In 1996, under the Liberals, the peak of poverty in the last 40 years, 16.2% of women were considered to be low income. In 2010, I am pleased to report that poverty among women dropped to an all-time low of 9%, which is a 57% decrease in poverty.

Another hard truth for the Liberals is that, before 2006, children experienced a higher rate of poverty than adults in Canada. In 2006, after we Conservatives formed government, for the first time in history children had a lower poverty rate than adults in Canada. That is something all of us can be proud of.

In 1996, under the previous Liberal government, 18% of children lived in poverty, which is 3% higher than working aged Canadians. As a mother of a young son myself, I find it appalling that the Liberals not only tolerated but continued to contribute to the increase in child poverty through their mean-spirited and poorly thought out cuts to transfer payments to the provinces.

However, under our Conservative leadership, by 2010 this number had been cut in half, with 8.2% of children considered to be living in poverty, a rate that is 1.9% lower than working aged Canadians.

To be fair, any amount of child or adult poverty in Canada is too much.

There is, however, a pattern here: under the Liberals, we get more child poverty; under the Conservatives, we get less child poverty.

For 13 years, the Liberals, who are so sanctimonious today, held a majority government. When they had the votes to pass any piece of

legislation to enact any program whatsoever what did they do? These self-proclaimed mighty defenders of those Canadians in need did the following. They launched an attack on the poor, the sick and the needy like no government before or since has ever done. They gutted transfers to the provinces and territories with staggering unprecedented cuts totalling tens of billions of dollars each and every year.

When they cut money to the provinces for health care, hospitals in my community closed, nurses were fired and doctors saw their working conditions deteriorate like never before. When they cut money for social services and for transfers to schools, colleges and universities, those buildings crumbled and community services were scaled back like never before.

This is not rhetoric. I am not exaggerating for effect. This is what happened. This is the Liberal record.

The statistics speak for themselves. Under the Liberals, the increase to the highest rates of poverty in 40 years happened in tandem with the cuts to provincial transfers.

Unlike the Liberals, our Conservative government made a commitment and cemented in law that those transfers will never be cut and that they will always continue to grow each and every year. That is exactly what we have done.

● (1530)

Let us think about our approach to transfers to the provinces for things like hospitals and schools. These transfers are the most significant means by which provinces help those in need. The transfers have been called more than generous by all sorts of third party observers. Why have the Liberals voted against these transfers at every opportunity?

We have taken many crucial steps as a government to ensure that vulnerable Canadians can fully participate in our economy. In 2007, we introduced the working income tax benefit to help ensure that more low and modest income Canadians are financially better off as a result of getting a job. In budget 2009, this tax benefit was enhanced by \$580 million, effectively doubling the initial investment to provide further support to working Canadians and their families.

We believe the family is a very important building block of society and it is one of the most important investments we can make as a society. Our government is committed to the family's well-being. We gave Canadian parents the choice to decide what kind of child care they needed for their families by providing parents with \$100 each month for each child under six years of age, a benefit that I certainly received for my son. The universal child care benefit enables parents to choose the care that best suits the needs of their children.

Business of Supply

In budget 2010, we made changes to the universal child care benefit to ensure that single parent families and parents with joint custody are treated fairly. Our government provides annual financial support under the universal child care benefit to about 1.5 million Canadian families. This is one program alone and it is responsible for lifting 55,000 children out of poverty. We provide over \$800 million to parents through the child care expense deduction, as well as about \$1.5 billion per year in tax support for families through the child tax credit. This money amounts to the largest investment in early childhood development and child care in Canadian history.

Our government recognized that it may be difficult for people who have full-time jobs to care for family members with serious illness or disabilities. Our government introduced improvements to the EI program to help parents balance work and family responsibilities during financially difficult and emotionally devastating times. For example, we expanded the list of family members and others considered as family under the compassionate care benefits so that eligible workers can take a temporary absence from their work to provide care for a gravely ill individual who faces a significant risk of death.

For the first time ever, our government created a program so that self-employed Canadians could opt into the EI program to receive maternity, parental, sickness and compassionate care benefits. Foster parents who have a child placed with them for the purposes of adoption can now take parental leave earlier instead of having to wait until the legal proceedings conclude.

We have also expanded access to parental benefits for military families. As Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, I have the privilege of serving the brave men and women who stand up for our nation. It was our government that made the changes to ensure that military members who returned from deployment could take their parental leave over a longer period of time, ensuring they have a very important opportunity to bond with their new babies.

Most recently, our government introduced the helping families in need act, which was tabled last week. It is a bill that introduces necessary legislative changes to help hard-working Canadian families when they need it the most. As a mom, I was thrilled that the government introduced the helping families in need act to provide supports to families in their times of need. The bill provides for an EI benefit for parents and guardians of critically ill children. It also provides an EI benefit of \$350 a week for 35 weeks for parents of children who have been kidnapped or murdered. I cannot imagine the devastation and anxiety of family members as they struggle with a kidnapped child or critically ill child. In these types of circumstances, I think Canadians can understand why we would want to support these families. We want to ensure that their prime concern and focus remains on their children and that they do not need to worry about their jobs, paying the mortgage or putting food on the table. Sadly, the NDP voted against the ways and means motion required to introduce this new law.

• (1535)

I would hope that the opposition parties could stand and support our measures to help Canadian families. We have been very strong, very solid and our track record speaks for itself.

Very succinctly, child poverty, adult poverty and poverty among women has been dramatically reduced in Canada under Conservatives. Members will recall that under the Liberals it was dramatically higher, an all-time 40-year high.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member opposite for her remarks.

I am not sure how she can be opposed to the Liberals' plan to such an extent, especially given the provision that seeks to help students with their loans. We can see that students are deeper and deeper in debt, partly because salaries have not kept up with inflation in the last 25 years.

Our proposal is to improve the funding for Canadian student grant programs. That would come to an additional \$200 million per year because federal transfers have decreased.

Would the Conservatives be interested in a measure that would help students to be debt-free when they graduate, so that they could actually focus on their studies?

[English]

Ms. Eve Adams: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for the opportunity to clarify the record. I certainly spoke to it during my remarks. The fact is that, under our Conservative government, transfers to the provinces for health care, universities, colleges and hospitals have not decreased but have actually increased.

I think the hon. member was probably thinking about the Liberal majority government that dramatically slashed transfers to hospitals. That was when all those hospitals in the Toronto area closed, as they did across the country.

The Conservative government has a very strong track record in maintaining transfers to our provinces for our needed social programs.

• (1540)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member has demonstrated that she has the ability to read speaking notes from the Prime Minister's Office and I applaud her for that, I guess. She has also demonstrated that she knows how to manipulate statistics, but I do not necessarily applaud her for that.

The reality is that, during the Trudeau era, poverty went down from double digits of around 11% to 7% or 8%. Then, during the Mulroney years, it hovered between that 7% and 8%. When the Chrétien government came in, it was reduced from 7% to 5% and we left the present government a huge budget surplus. We left an economic opportunity to make a significant difference in tackling the issue of poverty.

Business of Supply

Why does the member not recognize the facts as they are as opposed to trying to deceive Canadians by being very selective in what she is pointing out, which is not necessarily reflective of history?

Ms. Eve Adams: Mr. Speaker, I lived in Ontario at the time of the Martin majority government and he balanced the budget by dramatically cutting transfers to the province of Ontario and other provinces. During that time, a slew of hospitals crumbled and had to close. Nurses had to be fired. That is the Liberal track record. Every Canadian, certainly every Ontario resident and those who lived in the Toronto area, recalls those times.

Our Conservative government has maintained transfers to hospitals and each and every year has continued to increase them, which is something I campaigned for and it is something that every Conservative budget has delivered. We actually keep our word.

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the motion before us touches on many aspects of the work that our government has been doing to benefit hard-working Canadian families.

I wonder if my colleague could comment on how these benefits contrast with the NDP's plan to impose a job-killing carbon tax.

Ms. Eve Adams: Mr. Speaker, that is an outstanding question and one that my residents also want to hear about.

Unlike the NDP, which wants to bring in a new tax to take money out of hard-working Canadian families' pockets, to have civil servants in Ottawa spend more, and to increase the cost of groceries and every single aspect of their daily lives, our Conservative government continues to cut taxes. One of the most obvious ones is the GST. We have cut that from 7% to 6% to 5%. That helps every Canadian family every single day every time they make a purchase.

We continue to provide all sorts of additional tax benefits. We have lowered the tax burden on Canadian families to the lowest levels in Canadian history.

That is the Conservative track record and we will continue on that track.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand in the House to share with members the reasons why I will not be able to support the motion by the interim leader of the Liberal Party.

Although our government really takes the issue of income inequality seriously, to be quite frank I find the motion to be vague and disconnected. It is a typical Liberal approach to these issues.

The Liberal leader said he was proposing five very practical steps, but when asked what the cost would be, he did not have any idea.

As I have listened to the debate throughout the day, I have not heard how many people the motion would help or how it would have an impact on them. It is really very nebulous. These ideas do not knit together as a comprehensive strategy. For example, what about seniors? There is nothing on that. Are seniors not important in terms of income inequality?

I am proud to be part of a Conservative government that really acts rather than wanting to do more studies.

I would like to share with the House some of the actions that we are taking as a government. I have given one example already, in saying there is nothing about seniors in the motion. However, I will share with members some of the things that we are doing to deal with this important issue.

I first want to thank seniors for the sacrifices they have made and the foundational role they have played in building our nation. They certainly deserve our gratitude and support. They are the men and women who have worked tirelessly to build a better country for future generations. They are the men and women who have served in our armed forces to keep Canada free and make the world a safer place.

This weekend I had the opportunity to go to the War Museum. As I went through the exhibits from the War of 1812 to the Boer War and World War I and II, I was struck by the personal stories of those people who made this great country what it is today. It was very touching. I encourage people to take some time to go through that particular museum if they have not been there already.

Our seniors are the men and women who worked endless hours, gave their blood, sweat and tears, to build the economy of today, be it in a business big or small or on a farm.

That is why our Conservative government has introduced a lot of initiatives since 2006 to benefit our seniors and make their golden years a bit easier.

As we have seen time and time again, when we introduce what we think are important measures, the Liberal Party has stood up and voted against them. These include many of the measures we have introduced to help some of Canada's most impoverished seniors.

Here also, when the motion talks about the registered disability plan, it is a bit disingenuous, considering that we introduced it and the Liberals voted against it.

Another example is the guaranteed income supplement or GIS top-up for the most vulnerable seniors. Since July 2011 this top-up has helped seniors with little or no income other than OAS and GIS, by giving them additional benefits of up to \$600 for single seniors and up to \$840 for couples. I have heard loud and clear from constituents in my riding how important that is and what a positive change it has been. This is the largest GIS increase for the lowest income seniors in a quarter century. This is an investment of \$300 million per year for our seniors. This initiative will improve the financial security and wellbeing of more than 680,000 seniors right across Canada. Even the Canadian Labour Congress, which is probably not the best friend of our government, has said "This is a win for every senior living in poverty in Canada".

What did the Liberal Party do? Liberal members voted against helping those seniors most in need.

We have done more. We made sure that seniors can earn up to \$3,500 more before their GIS is reduced, so that our seniors can keep more of their hard-earned money without any reduction in their benefits. The Liberal Party voted against that too.

Business of Supply

Unfortunately, those are not the only measures the Liberal Party has voted against. It has opposed our measures reducing taxes for seniors. Our government cut taxes for seniors and pensioners by more than \$2.5 billion via targeted tax relief. Specifically, our government has increased the age credit by \$1,000 in 2006 and by another \$1,000 in 2009. We have doubled the maximum amount of income eligible for the pension income credit to \$2,000. We have introduced very popular pension income splitting. We also increased the age limit for maturing pensions and registered retirement savings plans, or RRSPs, to 71 from 69 years of age.

• (1545)

All of these are hugely important measures that are helping reduce the inequity for seniors.

With these combined measures, our Conservative government's low-tax record for seniors has substantially increased the income seniors can earn before they are required to pay a cent in income tax. For example, in 2012 a single senior can earn just over \$19,000 and a senior couple over \$39,000 before paying any federal income tax whatsoever. Even better, as a result of our government's actions, 380,000 seniors have been removed from the tax rolls altogether.

We know there is much more to be done and that is why we have done more. Seniors also benefit from our general tax cuts when we moved the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%. The Liberals opposed that. When we reduced the lowest personal income tax rate to 15% from 16%, the Liberals opposed it. When we increased the basic personal amount that Canadians can earn without being subject to federal income tax, the Liberals opposed it.

I could go on. For example, when the Liberals opposed the tax-free savings account they opposed something that was really helpful for seniors because the income earned within a tax-free savings account and withdrawals from it are not taxed and do not affect eligibility for federal income-tested benefits such as old age security or the guaranteed income supplement. In the words of the respected personal finance columnist Jonathan Chevreau, "[T]here is now a way that seniors can save that rewards rather than punishes them".

Seniors know that they have to be responsible and plan for the future and understand that one must spend responsibly to ensure that the next generation will have the services it needs. That is why as part of our economic action plan 2012, our Conservative government took important steps to ensure the future sustainability of Canada's social programs, placing key social programs on a sustainable path, ensuring that they will be there for future generations. At the same time, we recognize that many Canadian seniors who have the knowledge to share and skills to use do not want to be forced to retire before they choose to. We have given them more options to stay in the workforce if they wish, because we believe they should have the flexibility to continue to work if they so choose. That is why we eliminated mandatory forced retirement for federally regulated industries and why we will allow seniors who wish to remain in the workforce to delay or defer their OAS pensions for up to five years, allowing them to receive a higher annual pension down the road. That is why we have given massive new funding to the ThirdQuarter project to help seniors keep using their skills in the workforce. That is why we have introduced proactive enrollments into the OAS, removing the need to sign up for benefits for many

seniors, a positive measure that columnist Gordon Pape, writing in the *Toronto Star*, applauded as "[A] welcome elimination of bureaucratic red tape that should have the effect of putting a lot more money into the hands of seniors".

The bottom line is that we have a government that is taking action on so many fronts in a connected way for the entire population. In that regard, this motion is typical of the Liberals in being very disconnected and one that really will not accomplish what they say they want to accomplish. Again, our government takes very seriously the issue of income inequality in Canada.

• (1550)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the hon. Conservative member that there are regions in Quebec and in Canada, some of which are in my riding, where seasonal industry contributes to the economy and is often the last industry that is keeping the regions alive.

For example, in Charlevoix and the Haute-Côte-Nord, people will just have to choose between going away and going hungry. Whatever they choose, there will less money in the region. That is going to create a vicious circle and cause a dynamic economy to go into decline, forcing people to leave the region.

Do the Conservatives understand this reality?

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, absolutely, we have people in seasonal industries across this country. In my riding we have a number of tourist industries that are very periodic, for example skiing or apple picking in the Okanagan. That is why we made some changes to support those folks on EI, letting them know about opportunities that are near them and within their job skills category and available to them.

We have taken many important measures over the last year in the budget implementation act to support the folks in those industries. Those have been very important for the communities and the economy and will really help them move forward.

• (1555)

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the course of this debate we have spent a fair bit of time talking about people on a first name basis and hypothetical people. I want to talk about Roger Byers, who has given me permission to use his last name. He is a real person who lives in a real apartment on Hillsborough Street in downtown Charlottetown.

Business of Supply

Roger Byers is a frequent user of the EI system. He is from Atlantic Canada but he is not lazy. He has two jobs. One job is full-time for six months of the year as a labourer for the city of Charlottetown. Another job is part-time, year round, \$10 an hour for 20 hours a week at a bingo hall. For six months of the year this man works 60 hours a week. At the end of his term every fall he goes on EI, and under the present rules the clawback from his \$10 an hour job at the bingo hall is \$6. However, the clawback is now \$100 because of the changes.

I invite my colleague opposite to look in the camera and explain to Roger Byers from Charlottetown how these measures are fair to him.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, what the member is talking about generally is very important. This is someone who wants a job, has two jobs and is willing to work hard. That is why we have made the economy and jobs and long-term prosperity a priority, because I know that the person mentioned would want to have a job available to him.

Over 770,000 net jobs since the worst part of the recession have been created and we are creating a climate for success for new businesses to open in those communities. Those are the things that this person would be very interested in and the opportunity to put in the good work that he does.

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the parliamentary secretary's outlining how the situation for seniors has improved under our government. What initiatives by our government have had the greatest positive impact on low-income, vulnerable seniors in Canada?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, there were so many items that I outlined, whether it was the increase in the GIS or the ability to make a little bit more money before the GIS is clawed back.

The Liberals and NDP are perhaps forgetting what is most important. As a finance committee we held meetings in the United States and at every single meeting the people said that we were so lucky in Canada, that our economy was stable and that we were such a fortunate country.

Again, the most important thing we can do is to have a strong, stable economy so that we can continue to support our seniors in need and those around us who are most vulnerable.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

I rise today to address the growing income inequality gap and to ask that the government take immediate action to make a real difference to Canadians, many of whom are suffering.

I have the privilege of representing the riding where I was born and raised. While we are proudly one of the most multicultural ridings in the country, we also have our challenges. Almost 20% of our residents are not yet citizens, and so our families face family reunification challenges and language and job barriers. Almost 25% of our families are headed by single parents, who work two or three jobs just to put food on the table. Almost 20% of our riding is engaged in manufacturing, the second highest percentage for the entire country.

Income inequality hurts Canadians. If middle-class families cannot buy the goods and services that businesses are selling, the entire economy can be affected. In fact, research shows that countries with less inequality tend to have steadier and stronger economic growth in the long term.

This Parliament should be able to imagine and fight for a future where the people who work hard in my riding and ridings across our great country can get a good job, buy a home, raise a family, pay for their children's education and save for retirement, and where the income inequality gap is not ever-increasing.

I am going to provide three concrete examples of how income inequality disproportionately affects our children, those living with disabilities and those who provide care, and how income inequality hurts real Canadians.

Let me begin with children, society's most vulnerable and the voiceless, particularly the one in five who live below the poverty line. I ask directly of the government, what is the state of childhood in Canada? How does Canada compare to other countries? Does the federal government spend enough money on children? Do we even have the data? Who speaks for children and ensures that every child matters? Are children asked and listened to? Do we have the right government structure and policy agenda to ensure effective advocacy for children?

We need change for children. We must put children at the centre of our policies. Nurture demands political advocacy for children's best interests, starting with the basics of love and care and seeing through the eyes of children. This is why, as the hon. member for Westmount—Ville-Marie is advocating, we so desperately need a children's commissioner in Canada who is independent and can speak for the most vulnerable in society.

Tragically, in some parts of our great country families eat only one meal a day instead of three. More often than we would like to admit, some family members eat while others go hungry. No family should face such choices in Canada. No one should face such hardship, not in a country of such enormous wealth.

Hundreds of thousands of Canadian children go to school hungry, and 40% of our elementary students and 62% of our secondary students do not eat a nutritious breakfast. As a result they may stop growing and may be too hungry to learn. When they are older they may be too undereducated to work to their full potential.

Despite the staggering statistics, percentages and well-known outcomes, Canada remains one of the few developed countries without a student nutrition program. If providing food at school increases graduation rates by only 3%, a pan-Canadian school meals program in high schools, at a cost of \$1.25 a day, could result in an annual net payback of more than \$500 million.

Business of Supply

Mere private members' bills or motions are not good enough to protect our children, their futures and our collective future. The government must demonstrate courage and tenacity to swiftly tackle the tragedy of child hunger in Canada while building local markets for Canadian farmers. As Buzz Aldrin says, "If we can conquer space, we can conquer childhood hunger".

In addition to serving my riding, I have the privilege of serving thousands of Canadians living with devastating multiple sclerosis, who bravely fight their disease each day and fight for clinical trials for CCSVI, as well as all those living with a brain disease, disorder or injury, which, along with mental health, affect one in three Canadians or 10 million Canadians.

• (1600)

While the government has promised a registry and clinical trials for CCSVI, all we have to date is announcements and no action. There are no cures and no effective treatments that will consistently slow or stop neurological disorders.

Families often feel impossibly alone and helpless, people like an extraordinary lady with MS whose young son recently suffered an aneurysm and a stroke. She has had to quit work to look after him. They are people like my own aunt who, in her 70s, is at her daughter's house at 6:30 in the morning to feed her daughter and then goes home to her husband who is now suffering with Alzheimer's disease, and my friend's grandfather who is 80 years old and was married for 60 years. He kept his promise to his wife, installed a bed in the living room and for seven years was her sole caregiver, bathing her, feeding her and carrying her upstairs to the washroom.

The government has to do better in terms of income and caregiver support. Whether a neurological condition is diagnosed in childhood, such as cerebral palsy, in early adulthood, such as multiple sclerosis, or later as in Alzheimer's or Parkinson's disease, as the diseases progresses it takes a toll on the caregiver's or person's productivity. This includes no longer being able to work, perhaps because of the disease but all too often because of the lack of accommodation in the workplace.

There are some relatively easy actions that could be taken now, for example, making employment insurance benefits more flexible to allow people who have episodic conditions to work part time and receive partial benefits.

In terms of neurological conditions, the role of the caregiver changes throughout the course of the condition. Initially the focus may be on helping with finances, personal care and transportation; then later to ensuring that services are delivered safely as scheduled; and finally to being a member of the care team.

Today 2.7 million Canadians provide care for seniors. Family caregivers are responsible for 80% of Canada's home care services, providing over \$9 billion in unpaid care each year. Caring for family often results in lost income from work in order to provide care, as well as unexpected out-of-pocket expenses. For example, over 40% of family caregivers use personal savings to survive. One-quarter of family caregivers miss one or more months of work to provide care, and 65% of family caregivers have household incomes under \$45,000. Three-quarters of family caregivers are women, who are

more likely to have lower wages, fewer savings and additional responsibilities for child care.

The government must provide meaningful support for caregivers in the form of a comprehensive package of education, respite and mandated workplace accommodation with regard to the episodic needs of caregivers, and of course making the family caregiver tax credit refundable so low-income Canadians are not excluded.

The government must recognize the economic and social costs of caregiving, make existing tax credits refundable and explore ways to reform income security programs.

In closing, inequality can also twist or distort democracy. It can give a greater voice to the few who can afford high-priced lobbyists. I leave members with one final thought from the voiceless, a Canadian woman living with multiple sclerosis who says:

Don't forget me. I'm still in here, trapped in a body that can't move, that can't talk. But I think and I feel just like you do, and I hurt. I hurt physically and mentally.

The time to act is now. Our fellow Canadians are hurting.

• (1605)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that the member listed off a number of issues that families deal with every day.

Indeed, I would argue that families have been dealing with issues like this forever. When I was a kid my father virtually always had three jobs, and my mother virtually always had two jobs. They did what they had to do to provide for their family, and I appreciate it.

My mother also, after my father passed away, looked after both of her parents and she still worked her full-time job and she still had time for us. She is an incredible woman and I think an example of the things that, frankly, many families and many people encounter every day.

What the member seems to be proposing is some kind of utopian society where government looks after everything, where we do not have these concerns and where big government is there to pick everyone up and make it happen. I just want to invoke Thomas Jefferson at this point, because I do not believe that is the role of government. Thomas Jefferson said:

A government big enough to give you everything you want is strong enough to take everything you have.

I do not believe that government can fill all the gaps. It never can and that is why I think this debate is almost getting silly.

• (1610)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, Canada signed the 1992 declaration regarding food. We have a responsibility to meet that declaration. The government shows no sign of changing course and improving student nutrition.

The Minister of Health's office stated:

We see education very clearly as a provincial/territorial jurisdiction, so it's nothing that's being considered by our government at this point in time.

Business of Supply

This is extremely disappointing, considering the recognition by Dr. David Butler-Jones, Chief Public Health Officer of Canada, who stressed:

As a result of being hungry at school, these children may not reach their full developmental potential—an outcome that can have a health impact throughout their entire lives.

We are one of the few industrialized countries without a national breakfast program, the only G8 country without.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Etobicoke North for her excellent speech and for raising a very important subject.

We have to tackle child and student hunger. Years ago, we promised to fight and defeat child poverty. Investing in health is not a waste of money; it is an investment. That money can prevent the harmful effects of all kinds of social problems caused by child poverty. We have to focus on health and education.

My question for my colleague is very simple. She has actually already commented on this. Why does she think the Conservatives are refusing to support the health and well-being of our children? What is preventing them from taking care of our children?

[English]

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I want to stress what my colleague has brought forward. Better eating is not only about education. Rather, it is about improving nutrition, grades and health. Schools are merely the delivery mechanism, as this is where children and youth congregate. This is precisely why, for example, the federal government gives money to provinces and territories to deliver vaccine programs through schools.

I want to bring home the fact that there is a real potential economic stimulus for Canadian agriculture here.

Realistically, 70% of a pan-Canadian nutrition program could have a domestic content with an annual return to Canadian producers of \$1.5 billion. As a general rule, for each dollar spent in the community, an additional two dollars or three dollars would be generated through processing, storage, trucking, et cetera.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure I rise in support of the Liberal Party's motion in hope that members will see the value of recognizing the important issue of inequities and that widening gap between the rich and poor.

There is a role for the government to play. I think at times there is a great number of Canadians who are disappointed in the decision the government has made not to assist in trying to minimize that gap, as that gap continues to grow. Let there be no doubt that the government does have a role to play.

Prior to the last federal election, one of the big issues was corporate tax breaks. Members of the Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party said that we should no longer move ahead with the corporate tax cuts in favour of giving additional money to individuals who are on pension. We were referring to the old age security and the guaranteed income supplement.

Those moneys, if spent in that area, would have assisted hundreds of thousands of individuals, many of whom are very much part of the

living poor from coast to coast to coast in Canada, arguing at the end of the day that we need to provide more money or put money into those pockets and purses. We all benefit by doing that. We questioned at the time why the government was giving significant corporate tax breaks.

It is not to say that we should never give corporate tax breaks. All political parties have given significant corporate tax breaks, whether it is the provincial NDP in government, the federal Liberal Party in government or the Conservative Party in government. However, we would question the timing of those tax breaks.

We are in very difficult economic times. In comparison, on a worldwide basis, our corporate national tax rates are among the lowest and could actually be the lowest in the G8. However, the government wanted to reduce it even further. Was there a need for that? I would argue that there was not. The real need was to assist the seniors who need more money.

We have seniors who have to make difficult decisions about buying the pharmaceuticals they require or buying the type of food they enjoy. It is an issue of priorities.

There are programs that the government provides that go a long way to provide the equality of services, such as our health care. Health care has been a great asset over the years for Canadians. Whether people are rich or poor, they have the ability to access a free public health care system. Canadians assign a great deal of value to it.

We need to look at programs that would take it one step further. One of the biggest areas of debate today is in regard to pharmaceuticals and the cost of pharmaceuticals. When we look at provincial budgets across this country we see that some of the greatest percentage of increases in health care today deal with medicines. There is a huge vacuum in Ottawa where there is very little, if any, leadership on that particular issue.

A proactive national government would see this as an issue that is worth the battle. It would get into the trenches to see if it could do something about it. We in Liberal Party recognize the importance of that issue. B dealing with issues of that nature, we will narrow the gap. That is something we need to work toward.

● (1615)

My colleague from Toronto Centre made reference to education, the child advocate and how important it is that we, as much as possible, try to give every child the opportunity to succeed through education. It is very difficult. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of kids who go to school every day on an empty stomach. This is something that crosses all political party lines. Whether it is the NDP in provincial governments, the Liberals, the Progressive Conservatives or the Reform-Conservative government, they have not been able ensure that children going to school are not having to worry about being fed. It is hard for a child to concentrate in a classroom if he or she is hungry. In many situations, it is because of economic means that determines whether a child will eat.

Business of Supply

Have we made progress in certain areas? We have made significant progress. I know the government likes to take some very specific statistics but there has been progress in combatting poverty in our country over the last few decades. I made reference to the fact that during the Trudeau government back in the 1970s poverty was in the neighbourhood of 11.5% to 12% and then it was reduced to 7% or 8%. It was stagnant for a few years and then it was brought down by a couple more points during the Chrétien era. There is still a lot more room to improve on it. We need to develop programs that will actually make a difference.

For the last week, members of the Liberal caucus have been advocating for their constituents and Canadians with regard to employment insurance. There is a lack of confidence by the opposition toward the government in its ability to understand the issue to the degree now that Liberal members of Parliament are citing specific cases to get the government to better understand the real impact that its policy decisions are having on average Canadians and that are increasing the income inequality gap that needs to be addressed.

There are policy decisions by the government that have profound impacts. On the Prairies, I can talk about the Canadian Wheat Board and the hundreds of small prairie farmers who will be lost because of the government's policy decision, which will benefit the rich, I would argue. The greatest amount of benefit, I should say, will go to the wealthy. The ones that will be penalized the most will be the smaller prairie farmers, in good part.

Now we are hearing from colleagues in Atlantic Canada with regard to inshore versus offshore fishing. There are some similarities. We are concerned for the inshore fishermen. The fisheries is an industry that is critically important to Atlantic Canada and the government plays a very important role in its future. We need to ensure that those jobs will be protected.

That is why I say that the government has a role to play when it comes to dealing with the widening gap of income inequality. Whether it is a federal or provincial government, governments do play a role in the decisions that we make.

I believe this is an important issue that needs to be debated. The NDP should be looking at this opposition motion as a motion in recognition of the importance of the issue of inequality, what we can do and how we can contribute to ensure there is more opportunity for prosperity for all Canadians.

•(1620)

I think the core of this motion is about ensuring that all Canadians have the opportunity to be prosperous in a country that is so blessed with resources. We should be taking advantage of the great ethnic diversity and the great opportunities that are there. Governments should be there to support and develop it for all Canadians.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have had a number of town hall meetings with regard to the changes to EI and the eligibility age for old age security moving from 65 to 67. The people who are on social assistance or on a disability pension will now have to wait until age 67 for old age security. Both of those are paid either by the municipality or the province, which will now have to pay two years longer.

The changes to EI is an abdication of responsibility by the government. It is off-loading costs of about \$5 billion a year.

When we talk about inequity, there is a built-in inequity for those people who were looking forward to having a little more money at the age of 65 because of OAS and GIS but now they face an extra wait of a couple of years.

What is the member's opinion? Is it the agenda of the government to put people on welfare?

•(1625)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the government tries to give the impression that there is a crisis out there and that is the reason it is making the change to the age eligibility for OAS. However, that is just not true. The facts do not indicate that is the case. The reality is that Canada is in a great position to maintain and, I would argue, enhance our old age security program. If the government continues to neglect this and not reverse its change, let there be no doubt that as a direct result there will be more seniors in poverty. I think that is the message the member was trying to get across and what I mean in terms of government policy.

The government has the ability to narrow the gap but when it makes decisions, such as increasing the age of retirement from 65 to 67, it is doing the reverse. It will put more seniors into poverty.

The government does have a decision to make on this issue. We trust that the Conservatives will do the right thing before the next election or I can assure them that this will be one of the issues that we will be taking to the voters.

People should continue to have the option to retire at the age of 65. It is an important measure in terms of defeating the income inequality gap.

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just came in at the tail end of my colleague's speech but I think he mentioned something about the Canadian Wheat Board as if that was a detriment to the rural part of Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Alberta. However, just the opposite is true. I do not know if the member is aware but I will share with him the fact that the Canadian Wheat Board is now purchasing canola. It has never done that before. It is also making purchases in wheat, flax and other grain cereals.

The truth of the matter is that the Canadian Wheat Board has never had it so good in terms of its profitability and how this crop year is looking. It will be interesting to see the bottom line a year from now, but it certainly is not a bad story for the Canadian Wheat Board.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, what we have to do is listen to the 10,000-plus farmers who voted against the government's dismantling of the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly. They realized that at the end of the day, it would mean fewer Prairie farmers and the economies of many rural communities would be negatively impacted as a direct result.

I would believe those tens of thousands of farmers more than I would the Prime Minister's Office, or his speaking notes.

Business of Supply

The Deputy Speaker: 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 Guelph, Government Programs; the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, Health.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank my colleagues who spoke so eloquently about this motion. I will mainly focus on the unfair clawback of employment insurance benefits, which discourages many Canadians from working while they are receiving benefits.

On March 29, 2012, the federal government presented its first budget as a majority Conservative government. This budget includes a number of changes to the employment insurance system, which were set out in the Jobs, Growth and Long-term Prosperity Act. Since last spring we have discovered one thing after another in this omnibus bill, which is a real Trojan Horse. We now know that, aside from 50 or so pages of tax measures, hundreds of other pages were dedicated to repealing or amending 69 acts on a variety of subjects that should have necessitated a number of public consultations. This bill affects, for example, old age security, immigration, the environment and my file, employment insurance.

Under the announced changes, fewer people will be eligible for employment insurance benefits. More people will be forced to accept lower-paying jobs and many people will be redirected to provincial social programs. The announced measures target seasonal workers in particular, or those who have temporary jobs or whose work situation is unusual and who hold more than one job to make ends meet. In short, they target the poorest members of society.

In July, 508,000 out of 1,377,000 unemployed Canadians received regular employment insurance benefits, which means that 870,000 unemployed workers were left without unemployment insurance benefits. Fewer than four out of ten unemployed workers receive unemployment insurance. That is unprecedented.

An old pilot project enabled claimants who worked during their benefit period to earn up to \$75 a week, or 40% of their weekly benefits. In August 2012, the government introduced a new calculation method. This method penalizes workers in the regions, seasonal workers, on-call workers and temporary workers. A vast majority of claimants are penalized by this measure.

That is the crux of the issue. Previously, claimants working part-time while receiving employment insurance had the opportunity to take home a larger portion of their earnings, but now they are at a disadvantage. I have an example. I found out about one of my constituents who is dealing with this problem. Her weekly income is \$271 before deductions. Last week, she worked 14 hours, earning \$148. Before August 5, 2012, she was allowed to earn \$271 plus \$108, minus the \$148 she earned, which comes to \$231. Under the new system, she still gets her \$271 before deductions, plus 50% of the \$148 she earns for working 14 hours, which is \$74, minus \$148,

which comes to \$197. That is \$34 less than she was earning before the Conservatives reformed employment insurance. That is completely unfair to low-income families, who are the hardest hit by this change.

Compared to the previous program, the new pilot project that allows people to work while receiving employment insurance benefits will not provide an incentive to many employment insurance beneficiaries who can find work for just a few hours a week, for low wages or for a combination of the two. Unlike the previous program, the new system discourages workers from holding several jobs.

So the question is, are the Conservatives truly incompetent, or are they deliberately attacking more and more poor people?

As for premiums, which the Liberals mention in part (a) of their motion, we must not forget that the current \$9 billion deficit in the employment insurance operating account would not exist had the Liberals and the Conservatives not plundered the fund for decades.

• (1635)

These governments diverted \$57 billion—sometimes this amount is estimated at \$58 billion—of the employment insurance fund or, in other words, worker and employer contributions. They used it to balance their own budgets. Had this money not been taken from the employment insurance fund, we would not be under pressure now and we would not be seeing increases in EI premiums.

In economic good times, the Liberals and the Conservatives used the employment insurance surplus to meet their own objectives. However, now that the program is running a deficit, they are making sure that workers and employers are the ones who will pay off the debt. Clearly there are two sets of rules. Everything depends on the cost effectiveness of the program.

What is important to remember is that people are caught between a rock and a hard place. I think I showed that today in question period.

People are being offered jobs located extremely far from where they live. As we saw today in question period, people sometimes have to travel 12 hours and pay to take the ferry if they live in the Magdalen Islands and have to get to Bonaventure.

What is being offered to claimants is unrealistic, but they have to accept these jobs and these regulations or their income will be cut by 70%. If there is no work because the season is over, people should be able to receive employment insurance benefits until the beginning of the next season.

Another problem is areas that are getting poorer where people will be unable to find work but will not agree to travel further than what has been deemed “reasonable” or accept so-called “suitable” employment.

Business of Supply

Today, I spoke about a man from Carleton who could have taken a job at a fast food restaurant in Gaspé, which is a three-and-a-half-hour drive away from where he lives. People can turn down jobs but then they will not be entitled to receive employment insurance benefits.

The NDP certainly supports parts of this motion because it is the poorest people who are affected. In our society, there is a gap between the rich and the poor, and that gap must be reduced.

We really need to recover the money that unemployed workers are losing and not reinvest it in unrelated areas.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the employment insurance program, I understand there was an issue about general revenues versus a separate fund. My understanding was the federal Auditor General suggested it be put into the general fund.

Maybe the member could correct me if that is not the case. If it is the case, would she support the fact that we should listen to the federal Auditor General?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, a number of stakeholders have spoken about this famous general fund. Some social groups say they are in favour of the fund, which would be completely autonomous and would be used only for employment insurance.

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague did a good job expressing the reality of some regions across Canada.

I just put the question to our Conservative colleagues, but they seemed to avoid the subject. I really have the impression that they are unaware of the reality of our rural regions or that they are writing off certain regions.

The seasonal industry is an industry that benefits the economy of the entire country, and there are places where it is all they have left.

I would like my colleague to make a few comments about that.

• (1640)

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord.

The reality of people in the regions is very different from that of people in urban centres. Distances are vast and job offers are few. When the tourist season is over, it is over for these people. They cannot choose to do something else, because there is nothing else.

So, either we favour—and I hope this is not what the Conservatives want to do—a total exodus and empty the regions, or we agree to introduce measures to help the unemployed.

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her excellent speech. She spoke at length about employment insurance. I know that she is very close to people, a woman who is well aware of the consequences that legislation can have on our lifestyle and quality of life.

The motion moved by our Liberal colleagues includes a rather interesting tax credit, one that would make the family caregiver tax credit refundable so that low-income Canadians are not excluded.

Since we know that many Canadians are unfortunately living in poverty, does the hon. member not feel that it would be a good initiative to help people who are trying to help their parents or other family members have a better quality of life?

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, the refundable tax credit would indeed be an excellent move, especially when we are talking about tax credits that are deductible from income.

We are hearing more and more that Canadians are becoming poorer. Take the case of an employment insurance claimant who gets 55% of his original salary. His income is therefore reduced. What tax credits can he claim? If your income is low, you cannot claim any.

So instead of deducting from one's income a tax credit for looking after the elderly, the sick or children in need of care, a refundable tax credit would be provided that could be used, for example, to subsidize the children's recreational activities.

Ms. Manon Perreault (Montcalm, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we are discussing a motion that asks the government to introduce a series of measures aimed at correcting the growing income inequality in Canada.

Among those measures, we have this one specifically:

(d) making the Registered Disability Savings Plan available to sufferers of chronic diseases such as Multiple Sclerosis;

Naturally, this is the initiative I am going to focus on.

I support a measure like this without question since it deals with one of the problems with the registered disability savings plan. Although the plan clearly has other problems, I will focus on the one addressed by this initiative. At the moment, the registered disability savings plan is available only to those who are eligible for the disability tax credit.

To be eligible for that tax credit, a person must have a severe and prolonged impairment in physical or mental functions for at least 12 months. This condition is difficult to fulfill for people suffering from chronic or recurrent conditions like multiple sclerosis or chronic fatigue syndrome.

They have a different kind of impairment. For example, people suffering from these impairments may be able to carry out daily activities and even to work for a certain amount of time. Then, suddenly, it becomes impossible for them to do anything. Unfortunately, because of the cyclical nature of these illnesses, those individuals are very exposed in terms of most programs for those with functional impairments.

Business of Supply

In fact, most of these programs are designed with the idea that the disability is permanent and does not change significantly. So it is high time to change this program, whose injustices are just going to get worse over time. We know for a fact that the number of Canadians with episodic impairment is on the rise.

The government must include those Canadians in this income support program. We know that 55,000 people suffer from multiple sclerosis, that 63,000 have HIV and that 330,000 people have chronic fatigue syndrome. If the program works well for those who are eligible for it, but too many people are excluded, then it is not very effective.

It goes without saying that it is worthwhile enhancing and extending this plan. Yes, the registered disability savings plan could be considered as an innovative tool for reducing poverty in the long term because it targets low- to modest-income workers living with a disability. However, as I said earlier, the eligibility criteria for the registered disability savings plan is much too restrictive.

By applying the same eligibility criteria as for the disability tax credit, hundreds of thousands of people with functional limitations are ineligible for the plan. This is very worrisome, especially for people suffering from multiple sclerosis, given that their condition fluctuates. These fluctuations can last months, even years.

Despite the undeniable benefits of the plan for the people who are eligible, the government's account of its record leads us to believe that it is spouting this rhetoric in order to divert attention away from the valid criticisms of its response to the income security challenges faced by Canadians living with functional limitations.

As we know, it is not in the Conservatives' nature to tackle income inequality. Their vision of equal opportunity is vastly different than that of the NDP. However, they should give serious consideration to the most recent report of the Canadian Human Rights Commission released this summer.

This report points out the significant gaps in equality of opportunity for people with disabilities. In other words, it reports on how disabilities affect equality of opportunity in daily life and the barriers that deny people living with a functional limitation the full opportunity to make for themselves the lives they wish to have. This includes graduating from university, having a full-time job, and having an annual salary, although it is often lower of course.

This is the case for people affected by mental illness and episodic illnesses, who are more likely to participate sporadically in the labour force, which is the reason for their significantly smaller income. People with disabilities were negatively affected in all categories examined.

• (1645)

Persons with disabilities are the poorest in Canada and they represent the highest number of unemployed workers.

According to Statistics Canada's last Participation and Activity Limitation Survey in 2006, 14.3% of the Canadian population, or 4.4 million people, had a form of activity limitation. That rate has been going up since 2001. This trend will only increase with time, since that rate increases with age. The problem related to the openness of

the system, and to eligibility for tax credits for persons with disabilities, must be dealt with head on.

This is the biggest obstacle to opening a registered disability savings plan, and it undermines the long-term effectiveness of the program at the same time. We quickly realize, through many examples, that the definition used as an eligibility criterion is much too strict, very poorly understood, and not applied consistently. Furthermore, we also discovered problems regarding the criteria and the assessment method, the development of the formula and the qualification process by a qualified practitioner.

Access to the tax credit is extremely problematic. Some people with serious functional limitations cannot take advantage of this opportunity. The worst part is that many are those whose applications were rejected and who do not want to appeal the decision because they do not want to waste their time, energy and resources on what they see as a losing battle against government bureaucracy.

Others simply decided not to apply because they did not think they were eligible based on the criteria, in spite of their condition. Others were told by a doctor, without assessment or objective explanation, that they were not eligible. People with certain types of mental health issues are also often excluded from the tax credit. That is the case for people with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

There is obviously a serious problem with respect to assessments for eligibility for the tax credit. A good assessment tool is needed to determine eligibility, and at the end of the day Canadians are paying the price.

This issue is not new. In March 2002, the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities presented a report recommending that the definition be changed to include people who have a serious impairment that is recurrent, but not necessarily lasting for a continuous period of 12 months.

The committee recognized that many Canadians with episodic disabilities were unable to access the tax credit despite their condition and the costs associated with it. However, the government at the time did not provide a direct response to the committee's recommendation and merely reiterated that the criteria were key in determining eligibility. I need not remind you that this was a Liberal government.

Unfortunately, after all these years, the problem still exists. The application is still too complex. The terminology and definitions used in the disability tax credit certificate are too restrictive, which ultimately leads to inconsistency and discrimination.

It is time to assess whether the disability tax credit is truly effective in terms of the support it provides to the registered disability savings plan. The tax credit must not be an obstacle to these savings plan. We must therefore relax the eligibility criteria for the tax credit and make the definition much more inclusive. If not, the registered disability savings plan is simply not fulfilling its purpose properly.

Business of Supply

The NDP wants a Canada that is truly accessible and inclusive with a federal government that takes its responsibilities seriously, demonstrates leadership and works to combat poverty among people with functional limitations. In order to achieve this goal, there is an imminent need to reform existing income support programs. That is what we want, and that is what we are going to do.

* * *

● (1650)

[English]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations on the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, on Thursday, November 8, 2012,

- (a) the House shall meet at 10 a.m. and proceed to Government Orders;
- (b) Members may make statements pursuant to Standing Order 31 at 11 a.m.;
- (c) oral questions shall be taken up not later than 11:15 a.m.;
- (d) the House shall proceed to the ordinary daily routine of business at 12 noon, followed by Government Orders;
- (e) Private Members' Business shall be taken up at 1:30 p.m.; and
- (f) the House shall, at 2:30 p.m., stand adjourned until Monday, November 19, 2012, provided that, for the purposes of Standing Order 28, it shall be deemed to have sat on Friday, November 9, 2012.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. chief Government whip have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—INCOME INEQUALITY

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before moving to questions and comments, I would first like to thank my colleague who brings a completely different take to the current debate on the Liberal motion moved in this House today. The part of the debate where people with a disability were not necessarily considered really interested me. I thank her for that intervention.

I want to come back to what was presented with regard to disabilities. In fact, I want to link it with what I have been saying in this House today, and that is tax credits for family caregivers that would be converted into refundable tax credits. Everyone knows just how difficult it can be sometimes for family caregivers taking care of a family member with a lot of problems. It is very difficult for them to have these dependents, to juggle caring for a family member in need of help and caring for their own family at the same time.

Does the hon. member not think that the Conservatives are engaging in a tiny bit of demagoguery by voting against this motion,

when low-income individuals need this type of refundable tax credit?

● (1655)

Ms. Manon Perreault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. I think it is a little strange that some members do not understand this inequality. Naturally, the problem is that the program is really unfair in its current format. It does not adequately and fully meet the needs of disabled individuals since being eligible for the tax credit is necessary in order to be entitled to the registered disability savings plan.

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, members may recall that both Conservative and Liberal governments have, in the past, taken money out of the employment insurance fund and spent it in ways that did not benefit workers even though that money belongs to workers. Members may also recall certain tax credits.

On paper, the motion looks fine, but can we really trust the Liberals to put words into action?

Ms. Manon Perreault: Mr. Speaker, can we trust the Liberals? I have no idea. As I said earlier, when they did that in 2006, nothing changed. I imagine the outcome would be the same this time around.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague gave a good speech. I will be brief.

I do not know whether she has talked to the Conservatives. I know that there are many of them here and that it can be difficult for them to understand Liberal motions.

I think this question has come up, and I know our leader asked it several times. Does my colleague know of any reason why the Conservatives would not want tax credits, regardless of what they are for, to be refundable?

Ms. Manon Perreault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. Naturally, I would be very pleased to know the reason. I cannot fathom why a person would not be eligible for a tax credit or for the registered disability savings plan. That keeps even more disabled people in poverty. What should we in the House do about it? We should help these people get into the job market, and socially, we should help them to live more normal lives.

[English]

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour but a disappointment in a way that we have to stand in the House to debate this motion that our hon. leader has presented.

I do not know the time that is permitted, but if there is extra time beyond my 10 minutes, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel.

I would like to start with a news item that was on CBC *NewsWorld* this morning. It was stating what wonderful shape Canada is in, compared to all the other countries. We are number two as far as standard of living goes or the happiest people in the world. We are only number two. Number one is Denmark, so it is a pretty good standing.

Business of Supply

When we look at other rich countries like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, we are way above them. One might ask why we are so far ahead as far as standard of living goes. Of course there is health, education, the cost of our food and many reasons. However, one of the biggest reasons, similar to some of the Scandinavian countries that are in the same league as us, is how we take care of each other. We have an economy that prospers; we have all the tools to keep a good economic engine. Also we have good social programs that take care of the people who are in need, who may be going through stages in their lives that are disruptive.

We often talk about the individuals, and that is key. However, we also have to look at the bigger picture, how some of these changes help the local economies and local small businesses. Some news articles are saying that in Canada the gap between the rich and poor is growing. Canadian families have watched their incomes stagnate and decline even though their cost of living has been driven up, the cost of everyday goods like groceries, education and pharmacare.

Over the past year, the Conference Board of Canada; the dean of the Rotman School of Management, Roger Martin; and the Governor of the Bank of Canada, Mark Carney, have all warned us that income inequality could limit Canada's growth and threaten a sustainable prosperity.

As was mentioned by the late President Kennedy, the tide has to bring everybody up. If we start separating those different gaps, we will slip back in time. I remember a time in Cape Breton when the people who ran the coal mines were the rich people in the community and the people who were working in the coal mines could barely make ends meet. I hope we are not, as a society and as a country, slipping back to that era where we are going to have that gap. The OECD noted that the average income for the top 10% of Canadian earners in 2008 was \$130,000, 10 times more than the bottom 10%. That gap is widening.

One would question what the Conservative agenda is. Is it to increase that gap? According to the June 2012 Statistics Canada report, the median family income did not increase in 2010 and it has been falling from 2008 and 2009. This was the first drop of the median family income since the 1990s. We are a prosperous country and we are letting people fall through the cracks. We are not taking care of them. I could give examples in my riding.

There are things we have established over the years, not just the Liberal Party, but all parties. We talked about education and health, but take even our agriculture system, with supply management, for example when we had the Wheat Board. Those were things that made farmers prosperous. Take the policies that the fishermen have in my community alone, with small fleet owner-operators. They own the fishing licences. They have the resources of themselves to reap the profits, and the EI system helps fill the gaps.

Even in the United States, how well are the fishermen in Maine doing? They are doing very poorly with their system, because the government allows a free-for-all. The same is true for agriculture. Dairy farms in Vermont and across the U.S. border are not doing as well as our farmers.

Therefore, when we look at different segments of our society and compare them with other countries, even south of the border, there is

a reason why we are number two. It is that we have good social programs and good economic drivers.

Getting back to my riding and some of these changes in EI, for instance, my riding is an urban and rural split. Most of my rural area is over a mountain range, away from the urban area. We have a county called Victoria County. That is where I get the Sydney—Victoria name, because I have the Sydney area and Victoria County.

● (1700)

Victoria County has a lot of fishing and tourism. Communities like Neils Harbour and Ingonish rely on fisheries and Parks Canada, but in the wintertime these industries are shut down. People might get a job at the Legion, sweeping up, or help somebody down the road make traps, or get a day here and there doing something else just to make ends meet. If they are lucky, they might get one day a week.

The changes to the EI system that the Conservatives are doing tells them to get another job. Where are they going to get another job? How are they going to travel in the snowy winter conditions over the mountain? These policies are just driving people right out of these rural areas and they are a detriment to the businesses.

These are seasonal workers I am talking about. It has been brought up many times today that not only will seasonal workers in forestry, fishing, farming or tourism be affected, but substitute teachers will be affected as well. Some of them travel a long distance just to do one day in school. They are going to be penalized.

We are also looking at health care workers who might have been laid off. They sometimes fill in on the weekend when there is a shortage of nurses. They will come all the way in for what? They will have to get a babysitter. They will need to have a car available and pay for gas. Clawing people's EI back by half will be a real cut.

Probably 30% to 40% of many regions in Atlantic Canada rely on the resource industries out west. The NDP has taken a shot at that, calling it the Dutch disease. Resource industries are key to the economy of Cape Breton and Atlantic Canada. However, a lot of those industries have shutdowns because it could be too muddy to put a pipeline in or it could be too cold.

Therefore, sometimes many of my fellow Cape Bretoners have to take time off, and they are going to be penalized by the government for doing just that. The Conservatives think people should be able to work 52 weeks a year. If the work is not there, where are they going to work? Mines could be shut down. Commodity prices sometimes go down in nickel or gold, resulting in layoffs. All of these people will be penalized, and my riding of Sydney—Victoria is going to feel the Conservative government's hits. More than 150 people have already been fired from the federal job bank.

These changes are even more stringent.

Business of Supply

I have a letter from Sandra McPherson. It takes quite a bit to write a letter and put one's name out there. She received the famous notification letter from Service Canada on the pending changes to new EI recipients. She says the letter was extremely misleading. When one starts to look at the numbers and ratchet it down to what was going to happen, it might be true under the comparison they used. The comparison that the department used involved three or four days a week. If someone gets to work three or four days a week, they consider that like being back to full-time work. That is not the case. Most people are lucky to get one day of work a week.

Ms. McPherson is a mother with dependent children. She works an eight-hour shift for \$10.50 an hour, thereby earning \$84. With the EI clawback \$42 will come right off of that. She has to pay for a child care provider, which is at least \$25, leaving her \$17 for that one day of employment. Ms. McPherson made a comment that is so true. She said some of the Conservatives buy orange juice for \$17 a glass. That is not going to help this lady.

The Conservatives have an attitude. They can spend money on their buddies in corporations, yet look at what they are going to do with the fishery. They are going to sell the fishery to big corporations, yet they turn around and pick on the little guy.

Ms. McPherson is a taxpayer. She went on to say that, while she is certainly in favour of saving federal coffers, this pilot project takes from the poor and gives to the rich. If people are called in for one day of work a week, they will suffer financially. If someone is called in for four days a week, that individual considers it a full-time job. That does not happen.

We get many cases.

Another lady did seasonal work for the same employer for 25 years. She always had the opportunity to pick up a few hours a week in the off-season. This made her life a little easier while trying to survive on EI. Now it will cost her. She will lose \$112 every two weeks.

Another lady has been working 40 years in an office. She works six months full-time as a bookkeeper around income tax time, and the other six months she works part-time helping some people with books, during which she has collected EI. With the new changes, she is going to lose \$400 a month.

I have more examples here, but my time has run out.

● (1705)

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I spoke earlier about the fact that I spent part of my summer visiting Port Mouton, Nova Scotia, Cape Sable Island and a number of places with fisheries or one industry towns. I talked about their concerns with the changes to EI. One of the changes to EI is that if over a certain period of time people do not find a job, then they start looking for one at 80% of what they used to make.

We are concerned that if this year people are hired at 80% and have the misfortune of being off again, they are hired at 80% of that and so on. Is this not an incentive for employers to start squeezing people in the market and make it another way of depressing wages on the east coast?

● (1710)

Hon. Mark Eyking: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's statement is true. It is a slippery slope. The Conservatives refer to repeat offenders of crime. Now for EI, they call those people repeat offenders. The employees and employers pay into that fund. We have a country that relies on natural resources. If they are going to call these people repeat offenders and they are going to start ratcheting down, technically they are starving them out of these regions.

If businesses starve workers out of these regions and force them to go out west, there will be no one to work in the fish plants or for the landscaping companies. When these people are starved out and are driven out west, these industries will collapse.

On the Toronto Stock Exchange, there are many companies relying on resource-based industries from rural Canada. The hon. member made a good point. It is a starving out of rural areas and the people there and it will eventually kill the businesses on the way through.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague that the new employment insurance system that contains the new working while on claim pilot project is really negative and discourages people who want to work part-time or for a lower wage.

One of my constituents came to my office to tell me that he has multiple sclerosis and that he can only work for a very few hours. Under this program, he loses a lot of his income. Thus, it is very hard for him to resist working under the table.

The Liberals are suggesting that it be withdrawn in its entirety, which would penalize those people who manage to find well-paid work.

Would it not be better to find solutions that allow all types of workers to benefit from employment insurance, based on a calculation of benefits that would allow everyone to be better served by employment insurance?

[*English*]

Hon. Mark Eyking: Mr. Speaker, we talk about EI, but the EI system is more than just employment insurance. The member mentioned that it might help people with MS or other illnesses, or people on maternity leave. Any country in the OECD that has any kind of good track record helps people when they go through troubled times.

Business of Supply

The Conservatives probably want to get rid of EI altogether. They can change its name and call it “helping people get through”. They can call it what they want, but as a country we have a responsibility to these people. If we are not going to help them when they have MS, cancer or are on maternity leave, then what are we here for? Are we here to let the rich survive and give them more? Even the United States is starting to rethink the way it is doing things and we are going the opposite way here.

My previous bill in the House, which people called the cancer bill, was not just about cancer. It was about people who were facing major illnesses. Whether it is in the EI system or not, we have to help people who are down and out, or going through troubled times, whether on maternity leave or they have cancer or MS.

The member is right that we need to have a system in place. If the Conservatives want to change the system, then change it. However, do not pick on the poor people or people who cannot help the conditions they are in. We should help them out.

• (1715)

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1755)

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

(*Division No. 462*)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)
Angus
Atamanenko
Ayala
Bellavance
Benskin
Blanchette
Boivin
Boulerice
Brahmi
Brosseau
Caron

Andrews
Ashton
Aubin
Bélangier
Bennett
Bevington
Blanchette-Lamothe
Borg
Boutin-Sweet
Brison
Byrne
Casey

Cash
Chicoine
Choquette
Christopherson
Coderre
Côté
Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver East)
Dewar
Doré Lefebvre
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Dusseault
Eyking
Freeman
Gameau
Genest
Giguère
Goodale
Groguhé
Harris (St. John's East)
Hsu
Hyer
Julian
Kellway
Lapointe
Latendresse
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
Leslie
MacAulay
Marston
Masse
May
McGuinty
Michaud
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Mourani
Murray
Nash
Nunez-Melo
Papillon
Péclet
Pilon
Quach
Ravignat
Regan
Scott
Sgro
sor)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)
St-Denis
Stoffer
Thibeault
Tremblay
Valerioté — 131

Charlton
Chisholm
Chow
Cleary
Comartin
Cullen
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Day
Dionne Labelle
Dubé
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Easter
Foote
Fry
Garrison
Genest-Jourdain
Godin
Gravelle
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Hassainia
Hughes
Jacob
Karygiannis
Lamoureux
Larose
Laverdière
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Liu
Mai
Martin
Mathysen
McCallum
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Mulcair
Nantel
Nicholls
Pacetti
Patry
Perreault
Plamondon
Rae
Raynault
Sandhu
Sellah
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
Sitsabaiesan
Stewart
Sullivan
Toone
Turmel

NAYS

Members

Adams
Albas
Alexander
Allison
Ambrose
Anderson
Ashfield
Baird
Benoit
Bernier
Blaney
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Barrie)
Butt
Calkins
Carmichael
Chisu
Clarke
Daniel
Dechert
Devolin
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Fast

Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Flaherty	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Gill	Glover
Goguen	Goodyear
Gosal	Gourde
Grewal	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hayes
Hiebert	Hillyer
Hoback	Holder
James	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Lebel
Leef	Leitch
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Mayes	McColeman
McLeod	Menegakis
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon	Opitz
Paradis	Payne
Penashue	Poilievre
Preston	Raitt
Rajotte	Rathgeber
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Rickford
Ritz	Saxton
Schellenberger	Seeback
Shea	Shiple
Shory	Smith
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Tilson	Toet
Trost	Trottier
Truppe	Tweed
Uppal	Valcourt
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	Wilks
Williamson	Wong
Woodworth	Yelich
Zimmer — 153	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

[English]

OPPOSITION MOTION—CANADIAN ECONOMY

The House resumed from September 20 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: Pursuant to an order made on Thursday, September 20, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion relating to the business of supply.

• (1805)

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

Business of Supply

(Division No. 463)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Ashton
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Bélangier
Bennett	Benskin
Bevington	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Borg	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Brison	Brousseau
Byrne	Caron
Casey	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Chisholm	Choquette
Chow	Christopherson
Cleary	Coderre
Comartin	Côté
Cullen	Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Dewar
Dionne Labelle	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseau
Easter	Eyking
Foote	Freeman
Fry	Garneau
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Godin	Goodale
Gravelle	Groguhé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Hassainia	Hsu
Hughes	Hyer
Jacob	Julian
Karygiannis	Kellway
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
Laverdière	LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Énard)	Leslie
Liu	MacAulay
Mai	Marston
Martin	Masse
Mathysen	May
McCallum	McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Michaud
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mulcair
Murray	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Pacetti
Papillon	Patry
Péclet	Perreault
Pilon	Quach
Rae	Ravignat
Raynault	Regan
Sandhu	Scott
Sellah	Sgro
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	
Sitsabaiesan	St-Denis
Stewart	Stoffer
Sullivan	Thibeault
Toone	Tremblay
Turmel	Valeriote — 128

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Baird

Private Members' Business

Bateman	Bellavance
Benoit	Bergen
Bernier	Bezan
Blaney	Block
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Daniel	Davidson
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Fast	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Flaherty
Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Gill
Glover	Goguen
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Hoback
Holder	James
Jean	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kent	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Lebel	Leef
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lizon
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Mayes
McColeman	McLeod
Menegakis	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Mourani	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon	Opitz
Paradis	Payne
Penashue	Plamondon
Poillievre	Preston
Raitt	Rajotte
Rathgeber	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Rickford	Ritz
Saxton	Schellenberger
Seeback	Shea
Shipley	Shory
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Trost
Trottier	Truppe
Tweed	Uppal
Valcourt	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wilks	Williamson
Wong	Woodworth
Yelich	Zimmer — 156

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

It being 6:07 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

● (1810)

[Translation]

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Jean-François Larose (Repentigny, NDP) moved that Bill C-399, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (volunteers), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to be here today to introduce this bill, which was drafted with the assistance of many parties. As a member of Parliament, I have heard from a great many people about this subject.

It is a real privilege for me to have this opportunity to talk about Bill C-399 today. This bill would create an income tax credit to offset travel costs for volunteers. I think that this is the first step in an exceptional direction. I am absolutely delighted to be talking about this bill today.

In my 15-minute presentation, I will cover three points.

First, I will talk about how our great nation recognizes the contribution of volunteers. Then I will talk about the problem of economic austerity that Canadians are currently experiencing to varying degrees. There is a lot of belt-tightening going on. Last, I will talk about a long-term, comprehensive vision and strategy.

This bill came about following consultations with various communities, many volunteers and different organizations, primarily in my riding, but also across our great land. I had the privilege of seeing and understanding many things because I had the opportunity to listen to people in different communities tell me about the problems that they are dealing with.

I would like to say that calling this piece of legislation “Bill C-399” seems rather cold to me, even though that is how things are done in the House of Commons. I therefore dedicated this bill to a person who was and still is very dear to my heart: my grandmother, Madeleine Nadeau. To me, this is “Madeleine Nadeau's bill”. She was the inspiration behind this bill—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. There is too much noise in the chamber. The hon. member for Repentigny has the floor. I would ask all hon. members who wish to take up discussions with their colleagues to please leave the chamber at this time and we will carry on.

The hon. member for Repentigny.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-François Larose: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, Madeleine Nadeau, a very important person in my life, is no longer with us. When she was alive, she gave her time and money. Her calling, her spiritual belief, was to help the community and her family, including me, her grandson. She always dreamed that I would end up here. I hope that she is looking down on me today because it is to her that I dedicate this bill, which is incredibly important to me.

Private Members' Business

I am also lucky enough to have a son with extraordinary grandparents, both on my side and on his mother's. They are philanthropists and volunteers. They actively help the community every day by listening, making suggestions or taking part in organizations, which they have a direct impact on.

We are at a turning point. A link must be made between what existed in the past and what must exist in the future. One thing has been consistent throughout time. Human beings have always had this spark in them, a spark that is so small yet so immense that they are able to accomplish many things. Human beings have found themselves in situations of crisis, in dark moments in our history. But human beings have pulled together, built our nation and managed to move mountains, just by working together, by listening and thinking about others.

It was natural for me today to debate a bill designed to help volunteers. Every day, we give them a pat on the back, say congratulations and tell them we are glad they are there, but we never talk about serious measures for their future.

There have been some bad apples over the course of history. As a member of Parliament, I meet people. I see that they have less and less confidence in politics at all levels. Yet, they are very generous. They are prepared to be philanthropic by sharing their ideas, knowledge, time and money with community organizations across the country. This is what allows us to progress.

We are living in the information age. Our needs grow with our knowledge. We are trying to resolve a host of problems pertaining to the environment and health. There are always people who find the courage to create organizations to solve problems and mobilize society so that concrete measures are taken to help people and solve problems. We must protect this spark and have vision.

We often talk about the economy, but when a society does not work together to implement social measures, we cannot talk about a good economy. If we want to progress, if we want the government to evolve, we must talk about community relations, where there are volunteers, where this spark lives in everyone and where we can progress together.

If the government had to take over for all the volunteers in the country, it would cost billions of dollars. My bill will cost \$800 million. It simply seeks to recognize the efforts of volunteers. It is a first step, but we must not stop there. We must go even further.

The Madeleine Nadeau bill is important to me. When I met with various groups and volunteers in certain regions of the country, I told them to take that the bill belongs to them and that it is non-partisan. It is a necessity. Everyone, at all levels, needs people who are willing to lend a helping hand. We need to help each other.

Some of my friends have gone through difficult times and received help from generous people in their community and organizations. These days, when it comes to services, we are just a number to the government. Furthermore, services for citizens are being reduced. However, no matter what kind of government services are needed, there is always an organization present. We can count on these people, who do not ask for a red cent, who are present, listen, are sincere, care for us and are there to help us. We cannot go on giving them just a pat on the back.

● (1815)

With respect to international policy, things are becoming increasingly difficult around the world. Not just here, but everywhere. Things are looking increasingly bleak.

The good thing is that people realize it. They are not fooled. The people are mobilizing. People are deciding to roll up their sleeves, to work, to move forward and to get results.

I have had many opportunities in my riding to work for a full day with volunteers. I participated in *Fin à la faim* and the *March for Life*. Today, the youth of Saint-Sulpice were taking action.

They were not asking for any money, they asked absolutely nothing of the community; they wanted to give back.

They walked around their community wearing t-shirts with "30 km/h" on them to make people aware that young people are concerned and want things to improve.

We must take a stance that will move us forward in a tangible way and make for a better future. A bill is one step and a committee is one step. We must ask ourselves whether we have a vision and a strategy for the next government. Will we develop partnerships with organizations, volunteers, philanthropists and community organizations?

Honestly, based on what I have seen thus far, these organizations are most often the ones that speak most honestly and transparently. They are the ones that show an interest and a desire to help, that make sacrifices every day, and that pay out of their own pockets to volunteer and get direct results, helping the community and society grow.

The government cannot simply encourage them and say well done. It must tell them sincerely that we are fortunate to have them.

In cases of floods and crises, who takes action? We give money and vote on bills, but who takes direct action? It is the volunteers and organizations. They are the ones who make a difference and who will build our future. That is the only way possible. We must develop this vision and strategy together.

Once again, the Madeleine Nadeau bill is a first step. I am asking all of my colleagues not to hesitate and to make this cause their own.

● (1820)

[English]

I will say this in English and I will be very clear about this: Charity work is not just something for which we give a pat on the back. Our nation is built on it. If we are to move forward in the new millennium, we should stop talking about technology. It will be based on human beings. It will be based on relationships we have among ourselves. The only way we can move forward is if we ask for direct, concrete action and stop talking, because contrary to certain things, sometimes we do not talk enough and we do not listen enough. In this case, it has been going on for generations. We know this to be true.

Private Members' Business

We must, at all costs, with the sparkle we all have inside us, defend it, build on it, make it grow and say that it is a vision we have as a nation.

[*Translation*]

We must build our nation on a vision of helping one another. As I think of my son, I have always wondered where we are heading and what our national vision is.

Well, here is one. Helping each other and the giving of oneself are two of our most shining social values. This is true on all levels: on a spiritual level—all religious groups have been doing it for ever—as well as on a community level, through mutual assistance, sharing and cooperatives. That is where we are now.

This bill is not perfect and it cannot solve every problem. But it is a first step in a great journey forward to a beautiful future.

You may laugh, but I am from the *Star Trek* generation, those for whom money is not important. What is important is intellect, action, exploration, in a word, giving the best of ourselves.

We need to help each other. We have reached the point where we must stop dreaming about it; we must believe in it. Each day, our community shows us how and points us in the right direction.

I am still very honoured to be able to walk among my fellow citizens every day, to be with them, to be humble, to listen to them with humility—you cannot be too humble—and to see what is possible and where life may take us.

We must listen to solutions and put them into action. That is what volunteers do. They act without even asking for anything in return.

I have had the opportunity to meet and sit down with volunteers. What they tell me is not right. Though they are prepared to spread their love to those around them and give their heart and soul for each and every one, they are no longer financially able to do so, because they have to pay for their transportation, to get to where they need to go.

We are creating a bill that helps those people and that recognizes what they do; a bill that tells them that we are there for them and we support them, that we are ready to work with them and that we are ready to build our society with them, that we are listening to them, that they have our ear; a bill that tells them that we are going to do more than that now, we are going to take action.

I am very honoured to be here today.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague. He said a number of things that I found quite touching. I believe that he cares deeply about his bill.

I would like to know one thing: where did he get that \$800 million figure? Can he tell me who confirmed that and what it is based on?

• (1825)

Mr. Jean-François Larose: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my honourable colleague for her question. As she should know, when drafting a bill, we consult people. We consulted people on Parliament Hill. I am not a tax expert. We spent a lot of time

listening to volunteers, and we worked hard to figure out what they need.

Consultations were held. The numbers came from a tax expert who explained the repercussions and the costs this measure would entail, because it is important to manage the government's money responsibly. That is why it is important to have accurate numbers.

We weighed the pros and the cons, comparing the benefit to the community and the cost to the government of making these changes. Even if making these changes cost billions of dollars, that would be nothing compared to the quality work that volunteers do every day.

A thorough evaluation was done, showing that if everyone claimed this credit, it would cost about \$800 million.

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in my riding several years ago Hurricane Igor struck and in excess of 50 communities were isolated. The police were not able to get there in many cases. Provincial services could not, but there was one group that did and to say that they saved the day is an understatement. That would be the volunteer firefighters and the volunteer search and rescuers.

This is not a question so much as it is a comment and I would like my colleague to add to it. His speech was very passionate and he obviously spends a lot of time dealing with the people and the situation in his own family. We are absolutely inspired by people who give to charity, volunteer their time for the greater good and ask nothing in return. It is simply amazing what they do. What governments save in services provided by volunteers is absolutely immense. This is a token, but it is a good symbol as a token.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-François Larose: Mr. Speaker, as I travelled to different communities, I met with various groups, including firefighters, ambulance attendants and rescue workers. For example, I met with some Saint John Ambulance people who are on the job every day, wearing the uniform and receiving training.

During one trip, I even had an opportunity to meet with Canadians who have taken the initiative to provide rescue training without even being paid for it. Time and time again, crisis situations have come up in history. No matter the crisis, people have worked hard to help out. When the ice storm happened in Quebec, volunteers stepped up to help out.

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Repentigny for his excellent speech and his passion. His speech was truly amazing. Everyone has really thought about the people in their communities who make a difference.

Association solidarité d'Argenteuil is located in my riding. This group of people drive seniors to the hospital, to do their groceries and so forth. In these difficult economic times, they cannot necessarily afford to do so. It is becoming more difficult for them to help out. Volunteerism really makes a contribution to our communities and it is work of great value.

Private Members' Business

Could my colleague for Repentigny give some more examples that illustrate just how much volunteerism contributes to our communities?

Mr. Jean-François Larose: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his excellent question.

I have been out and about in my community and have met various groups. I have seen seniors break the isolation of others and people run a meals on wheels program for those who cannot or do not have the means to cook. They just help out.

My son's grandmother looks after people with various disabilities. Every time she has the chance to help someone out she does so with love and a great deal of respect.

In L'Assomption, I helped a group that was cleaning up the parks and the shoreline.

There are thousands of examples across Canada. I hope that this will continue.

• (1830)

[English]

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have tremendous respect for some of the things the member said about volunteers, because as we all know, they are some of the greatest Canadians in doing some tremendously important work in our country. However, I do have some concerns about the bill.

The NDP has been known to repeatedly promise Canadians some extravagant things. It insists on saying it is going to build this, start that program, focus on giving this group a tax credit and so on. However, to be very frank and honest, this would grow government. It would cost Canadians more money. Taxpayers pay for these things.

Therefore, when I asked the member where he got the \$800 million cost figure he provided, I was quite surprised at his response, because I did not expect him to be defensive. I inquired because Canadians want to know how we are going to pay for this. I am going to continue to ask the member to consider putting forward exactly where those numbers came from.

[Translation]

As my NDP colleague said, this would cost \$800 million. However, he did not want to say where he got that number or who reviewed and confirmed the cost estimate. Since this would involve considerable new spending, did the NDP determine where the money would come from? What tax do they plan to increase? What program do they plan to make cuts to?

[English]

Again, I am saying this with tremendous respect because I too feel that volunteers have done a number of things to ensure that the country goes forward and succeeds.

I would like to applaud and thank all volunteers for the hard work they do right across Canada. We all know someone in our community who has done some remarkable things. They have given time selflessly to improve the quality of life for those in need and they do it without expectation of reward or any kind of recognition

but because they care and want to make a difference in their communities. This is what drives them. I thank them, on behalf of the government, for all that they do.

As writer Erma Bombeck once remarked "Volunteers are...[those] who reflect...compassion, unselfish caring, patience and just plain love for one another".

Currently, Canada has one of the largest charitable and non-profit sectors in the world, with more than 160,000 charities and non-profit organizations helping those in need from coast to coast to coast. Our Conservative government stands right behind those charities with special tax support, considered to be among the most generous in the world. This includes the charitable donations tax credit, which encourages Canadians to support those great organizations. In fact, federal tax support for Canada's charities is nearly \$3 billion each and every year.

[Translation]

However, we all recognize that it is always possible to do more to help our charities accomplish their work. That is why, since 2006, the Conservative government has been providing increased support to charities through special tax assistance measures and tax incentives.

I am referring specifically to the elimination of the capital gains tax on donations of publicly listed securities to charities and private foundations; the elimination of the capital gains tax on donations of ecologically sensitive lands to public conservation charities; the reform of the disbursement quota to reduce the administrative burden on charities and allow them to devote their time and energy to helping people in need; and the crackdown on certain unscrupulous people who take advantage of the charitable sector.

I am pleased to say that all these measures have helped charities across Canada and the volunteers that support them by increasing the donations made to their noble causes.

• (1835)

[English]

In fact, the elimination of the capital gains tax on donations of securities has been tremendously successful. For example, the United Way of Toronto alone estimates it receives tens of millions of dollars a year because of this change. It has declared that "The tax benefits are certainly having a very big benefit on local charitable organizations".

Owen Charters of CanadaHelps, an online fundraising portal for charities, has also noted, "We've been quite surprised by the popularity. It was small steps at the beginning, but it has really grown".

Nevertheless, even with all of these positive steps to help charities, we know that more could still be done.

That is why shortly after the 2011 election our Conservative government asked the House of Commons finance committee to undertake an open public study to find out from Canadians directly the best way we could further increase charitable donations.

Private Members' Business

I should note that the inspiration for that study and the government's request was Motion No. 559 by the member for Kitchener—Waterloo, a motion that was adopted by Parliament in March 2011. I thank my colleague from Kitchener—Waterloo for all he has done and continues to do in support of the charitable sector here in Canada. Rest assured that charities and volunteers could have no better or stronger advocate in their corner than Parliament and our member himself.

The finance committee, which I am a member of, has been vigorously undertaking that task since January of this year. We have already had dozens of meetings and received submissions from over 50 charitable groups as well as Canadian volunteers from all across the country.

Throughout the hearings and in reviewing the submissions, we have heard a range of proposals from charities and volunteers about what we can do to further support Canada's charitable sector. I must note they have all been very appreciative of the measures this Conservative government has put forward since 2006. They were disappointed that the NDP did not support many of them.

[*Translation*]

None of these charities or volunteers have let it be known that the proposal presented today by the NDP would constitute an effective way for them to help people in need. In fact, this came up only once during the review by the Standing Committee on Finance. The reason for this is obvious if we examine the NDP's proposal a little more closely. This proposal raises serious issues and concerns. It would be very costly, extremely difficult to control and it is not clear if it would be worth it. It would also impose a large administrative burden on charities and volunteers.

Before I talk more about these concerns, I would like to clearly inform Canadians that volunteers are already receiving special tax treatment to support their efforts. More specifically, volunteers receive a tax exemption on the reimbursement of their expenses, which means that any costs incurred by volunteers, including travel costs, can be completely reimbursed on a tax-free basis. Thus, if people have to travel on behalf of a charity, they can be reimbursed for their expenses—mileage, gas, meals and other costs—and that reimbursement will not be taxed.

The NDP's proposal raises many concerns.

[*English*]

First, it would increase the administrative burden on charities by requiring each charity and non-profit that believes it deals primarily with vulnerable populations to precisely track the number of hours and to keep records of such travel.

Second, it would require government officials to subjectively determine what constitutes a vulnerable population and determine on a case-by-case basis if each of Canada's 85,000 registered charities serves that subjectively determined group, and then determine whether or not each qualifies for the special tax break. That would be a radical departure from the existing practice of treating all registered charities objectively.

Third, the cost would be significant.

These are just a few of the preoccupations the bill raises. I would encourage the member across the way to think about those preoccupations of Canadians as he moves forward, and to perhaps address some of the concerns so that we might better understand how his party intends to pay for this without raising taxes and without further damaging the process.

• (1840)

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill C-399, tax credits for volunteers' travel expenses.

I would like to begin by thanking the hon. member for Repentigny for introducing the legislation. I appreciate having the opportunity to discuss ways that we, as a Parliament, can better support volunteers and encourage volunteerism.

I will start by talking about some of what has occurred in recent years, particularly around tax measures to help volunteer emergency service workers or firefighters. There has been a consensus across party lines on some of the measures that we should recognize the important work of, for instance, emergency service volunteers, those who risk their lives in order to protect and make communities safer.

As part of that discussion, the Liberal Party proposed a \$3,000 refundable tax credit for volunteer firefighters. We made it refundable deliberately. The reality is that if these tax credits are not refundable, it means, perversely, that the lowest-income Canadians, Canadians who need the support the most, do not actually qualify and do not receive the benefit.

Earlier today we had a discussion on income inequality and the growing gap between rich and poor in Canada. The reality is that, to a certain extent, non-refundable tax credits can exacerbate that and make it worse by disqualifying, technically, the lowest-income Canadians who need the help the most.

For instance, we proposed a refundable family caregiver tax credit, which would have benefited all Canadian families providing care to relatives with health issues, in some cases palliative care and in other cases long-term medical issues. The Conservatives introduced, instead, a non-refundable tax credit, which looks like they are doing the same thing, but in reality it is not a lot of resources because it does not apply to a large segment of the population, the people who need the help the most.

What the government has become very effective at doing is establishing boutique tax credits that are non-refundable. They do not take a lot of money out of the federal treasury because they do not actually help a lot of people, but it looks like they are taking action.

People come to my office who are quite disappointed. They expected these new tax credits would somehow benefit them, only to find out that because of the fact they had low incomes, they did not qualify.

Private Members' Business

Let us take, for instance, a senior citizen on a modest fixed income who drives for Meals on Wheels. If the tax credit being proposed today as part of this legislation is non-refundable, that senior will not benefit because he or she is not paying taxes now. Just to make it clear, a refundable tax credit also benefits people whose incomes are so low that they are not paying taxes. A low-income senior who drives, for instance, for Meals on Wheels is still incurring expenses to volunteer. In fact, those expenses represent a very significant portion of his or her income. He or she still has to put gas in the car to get to the volunteer site or pay for public transit.

That brings me to the design of the tax credit under Bill C-399.

Bill C-399 would establish a tax credit to help volunteers defray some of the travel expenses they have because of their volunteer work. Unfortunately, the tax credit potentially established under Bill C-399 is non-refundable. We hope this could be addressed and corrected as part of the legislative process. Perhaps if this were to get to committee, it could be part of the discussion.

• (1845)

We support sending Bill C-399 to committee so we can discuss, among other things, design issues, including making the tax credit fully refundable.

We have a concern about the growing number of non-refundable tax credits. We believe it is in some ways exacerbating the issue of income inequality in Canada. These tax credits fail to meet the fairness test. It just seems wrong for the government to protect its own bottom line by deliberately excluding the most disadvantaged Canadians.

Beyond the non-refundable nature of the tax credit, Bill C-399 sets out some interesting parameters. To qualify for the tax credit, one must do a minimum of 130 hours of eligible volunteer work and so one must make at least 12 trips that tax year. For the purposes of Bill C-399, this would involve travelling a minimum of one kilometre from home to wherever it is one does their voluntary work.

In terms of the monetary value of the tax credit, Bill C-399 establishes a minimum value of \$500 and a maximum value of \$1,500. With a 15% federal personal income tax rate, the proposed tax credit would translate into a benefit of between \$75 and \$300 for the volunteers who qualify.

Finance Canada has estimated that Bill C-399, as it is currently written, would cost about \$130 million per year. However, officials were basing their estimate on past data and assuming that there would be no change in behaviour as a result of the new tax credit. They assume that this tax credit would not encourage new volunteerism or enable existing volunteers to travel more extensively.

Officials used data from the 2010 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, which shows that 1.2 million Canadians would meet the criteria of performing at least 130 hours of qualified volunteer work. They assumed that the average volunteer who had about \$430 of travel expenses would be eligible for a tax credit under Bill C-399. They also assumed that the average volunteer would claim a further \$500 in weekly travel expenses based on an average claim of 15 kilometres a week at 55¢ per kilometre.

The officials then estimated that one-quarter of the 1.2 million volunteers would not get any benefit from the proposed tax credit because it would be non-refundable and these volunteers would not make enough income to qualify. However, using the Department of Finance's own numbers, we extrapolated that it would cost about \$40 million to make this non-refundable tax credit into a fully refundable tax credit, which would benefit all low-income Canadians who would be currently excluded.

I encourage the member for Repentigny to consider such a revision to Bill C-399. The initiative is worthy of the consideration of the House. I hope the proposed legislation will receive second reading so we can more closely examine the proposal and consider making it fully refundable.

It is important for us, as parliamentarians, to recognize the vital contributions that volunteers make to Canadian society. We should not base that recognition on how much money is in their wallet. There are a lot of low-income Canadians who, if we were to move forward with this kind of measure, would deserve the same benefit. However, because they are low-income, they would not benefit by the bill in its current form as a non-refundable tax credit.

Those are some of my thoughts and I hope government members see their way to support taking the bill to committee so we can have a more fulsome discussion on how we can strengthen our support mechanisms in the tax system and other direct support for volunteerism in Canada.

• (1850)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak today, especially after hearing the speech and explanation of my colleague, the hon. member for Repentigny, who gave it the passion it needed. He dedicated this bill to his grandmother, Madeleine Nadeau. This bill must be considered carefully because it provides a lot of very interesting things.

My colleague is the official opposition philanthropy critic. So it is something he is really passionate about and has worked on for a long time. He has worked very hard, and has travelled all over Canada and met with people. He told us his story, with all the humanity he has for his parents and his family. This is truly an example of what passion can bring and what people in politics can achieve.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance made some fairly partisan comments. We need to remember that this is a private member's bill. My colleague clearly said that this is the start of a discussion that needs to be had. Referring the bill to the Standing Committee on Finance will give us an opportunity to answer some questions. The parliamentary secretary immediately asked the question about costs, and we have already seen a few differences.

Private Members' Business

I am very pleased to hear that the Liberals are going to support the bill so that it will at least be referred to the Standing Committee on Finance for study, given that our figures vary. We are told that the Department of Finance estimated the cost at \$130 million. It is important to consider the impact of this carefully, because we must not underestimate how important the volunteer sector is. I feel that everyone here, on either side of the House, recognizes that our society can prosper with the help of volunteers. Many people in certain situations have seen how very important their contribution is.

I must mention that Canada's volunteer sector ranks second in the world, behind the Netherlands, according to research published very recently, in September 2012. That is something we feel here; we have all experienced it. And that is why I urge hon. members to take the time to study this bill in depth before rushing to push it aside. The volunteer sector plays a key role in the development of our society, our economy and our democracy.

When disasters strike and crises hit, we know that volunteers reflect the best of human nature through the assistance they provide. That is why it is important to help them. Consider all the work that has been done. The hon. member for Repentigny said that volunteers have, for a long time, been admired, congratulated and patted on the back, but never have they received any direct help in their work. This is a first attempt, a first debate, a first step forward. I sincerely hope that hon. members opposite will at least agree to further examine all the benefits of this bill.

Let us take look at what is happening in practical terms. The opposition motion today spoke about the gap between the rich and the poor. Since the government's austerity budget is consciously reducing certain services, community and charitable organizations have an ever-harder job. Sure, they depend a lot on volunteers, but they still need some help.

Let us take a look at some volunteering figures. According to Statistics Canada's latest report on giving and volunteering, more than 13.3 million people, or 47% of the population, volunteered over 2.1 billion hours in 2010. That is equivalent to 1.1 million full-time jobs. We must not forget that this volunteering helps the economy, and when the government does not take action in certain areas and people need help, these volunteers are there to help them. We must consider the economic impact and benefits of volunteering. Encouraging it will only improve society.

• (1855)

According to certain figures, in 2007, revenues in the charitable sector were over \$112 billion, and volunteering represented 7% of Canada's GDP. We can clearly see that this has a considerable impact.

A 2006 study by Mook and Quarter estimated the economic value of volunteering hours at approximately \$20 billion. That is a contribution to our society and our economy that helps our country grow. It is significant.

I am very lucky to represent the people of Brossard—La Prairie, where helping one another is very important. In my riding there are more than 80 community organizations. I found that so important that my last householder focused on these organizations. It was obvious that people wanted to help each other. That is very important

and it truly helps advance humanity and society. That is very important to note.

One of those organizations is Brossard's Les Cuisines de l'amitié, which helps people living below the poverty line who need support and who need to prepare food. Volunteers are there to help them.

There is also the Association des personnes handicapées de la Rive-Sud Ouest. These folks help people with disabilities, particularly with respect to defending their rights. The organization has many volunteers who help with that.

The Complexe Le Partage is a truly extraordinary organization that helps people in need. We all know that more and more working families and individuals need help and food banks. The Complexe Le Partage is an organization that really helps people.

I have had opportunities to participate in fundraisers and charity drives. Participating feels good. As a child, I was a Scout, so I grew up with the idea of doing good deeds. That has always been a part of who I am. I have also been to Africa to volunteer in an orphanage. In so many cases, the time people spend is worth so much more than what money could buy. I have also been a soccer coach, teaching the game to young people.

Clearly, the time people give is rewarding for them and valuable for others. The goal of this bill is really to help people who want to keep volunteering. The impact will be huge. This is really very important.

[English]

I really hope my colleagues across the way will actually look at the bill, because the bill is a start. My colleague, the member for Repentigny, has mentioned that it is not something that it is final. It is a start. It is a dialogue. He has worked really hard. He has gone across Canada to talk to charities, to talk to people on the ground.

I think what we need to do is to look at the options. I hope my colleagues will at least support the bill, so it would at least go to committee so we can actually look at the costs and also look at the benefits of it. Hopefully, we will be able to work together on that.

Obviously, if it goes to the finance committee, I know there are few colleagues on the finance committee who are open to the idea of helping charities and volunteers. We know how important it is for Canada.

We have all seen what happens in a crisis, in terms of people getting together and actually working together. When we try to help our neighbours or people in a crisis, the idea is not, "What is my gain?". It is, "What can I do to help them?"

What this would basically do is help people who need to have a bit of support, because some of them need to have a bit of money and need to be compensated because there are costs.

So, I really wish my colleagues would support my hon. colleague's bill and bring it to the finance committee so we can actually look at it.

Private Members' Business

•(1900)

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to address a key issue in the debate on Bill C-399, a flawed piece of legislation, and to relate it to other more thoughtful ways in which we are helping charities and volunteers.

Before I highlight some of these areas, let me give a quick recap of what this legislation intends to do. Bill C-399 proposes a costly, new, non-refundable tax credit for individuals who perform a minimum of 130 hours of volunteer services for select organizations during a year and who make at least 12 trips in order to do so.

This proposal would cost over \$100 million each year, and it would be very difficult, if not impossible, for charities to track and administer.

One would hope, and I think Canadians have an expectation, that when members of this House introduce legislation it would be with the intent of benefiting Canadians. How would Bill C-399 benefit Canadians?

The member for Repentigny might be thinking that Bill C-399 would make it more attractive for Canadians to volunteer at their church, local youth group or community centre. As it is, a large number of Canadians donate some of their time to volunteering. In fact, according to a recent report by Statistics Canada, more than 13.3 million people, or 47% of the population, volunteered some of their time through a group or organization.

Clearly, Canadians like to volunteer. However, it is unclear whether the proposed tax credit would have any significant effect in increasing the rate of volunteerism in Canada. After all, proposals to provide tax assistance for volunteerism have been suggested before.

That being said, studies in recent years suggest that tax assistance, much like the tax credit we are debating today, would in fact not lead to an increase in volunteerism. In fact, a report out of Alberta, entitled *The Potential Impact of Canadian Federal and/or Provincial Tax Credit Incentives for Volunteer Participation*, suggests that not only would the introduction of such a tax credit not lead to an increase in volunteerism but it might lead to a decrease in volunteerism.

The report states:

The motivations of volunteers to “donate” their time may not be shaped nor directed by the “value” of their donation. The principle motivations are altruistic and egotistic in nature. The attachment of economic and specifically tax value to the “altruistic donation” may in fact reduce the motivations of volunteers to participate.

Similarly, a volunteer group in Quebec, Réseau de l'Action Bénévole du Québec, RABQ, found that tax credits did not result in more people wanting to donate their time to volunteering.

In fact, according to the former president of the RABQ, Rosemary Byrne, tax credits:

....didn't seem to have made a difference in terms of the numbers of people volunteering.

Byrne even went on to say:

No one in a lower tax bracket would have benefited at all; that was another disincentive.

If such findings are to be believed, it is doubtful that Bill C-399 is the correct approach to encourage more Canadians to get involved in

volunteering. Quite the opposite, the facts seem to suggest that if the House were to pass such a bill, it would be harmful to the rate of volunteerism in Canada.

For these reasons, I am very skeptical as to whether introducing a tax credit such as this is the right course of action. Furthermore, after the comments by the president of the RABQ, I am skeptical as to whether or not any volunteers would even be interested in taking advantage of such a credit.

That is not all. Another issue that must be considered with this proposed piece of legislation is the administrative burden it would place on charitable organizations and non-profit organizations.

It will be the charities, churches, youth groups, et cetera that will be responsible for documenting the information that will be needed by volunteers and the Canada Revenue Agency to confirm that individuals qualify for the credit under the Income Tax Act.

•(1905)

This means that for each volunteer, these organizations would have to track and record how many hours people are present, what they are doing and if they travelled to the location. Simply put, this sounds like a huge waste of time and effort for these organizations. Not only would this be a drain on their human and financial resources, but it would take away from the ultimate goal of charitable and non-profit organizations, helping people.

In recent years, many charitable organizations have been criticized for not using their resources in the most efficient means possible. Understandably, Canadians are frustrated when they hear stories about the donations they make to their favourite charities being used more on administration costs than on the research, aid or cause to which they donated their money. My concern here is that this legislation would not only heighten this frustration but would force charitable and non-profit organizations to divert their precious resources away from the good work they do to overcoming this obstacle. The evidence shows that this would be a significant new obstacle for these organizations.

According to Statistics Canada, Canadians volunteered nearly 2.1 billion hours in 2010. I am no expert, but I am willing to bet that it would take anyone a lot of time to record 2.1 billion hours of volunteerism. I do not understand why we would want to impose such an unnecessary burden on these organizations. What would that achieve?

What does this bill offer to those wanting to volunteer or for those seeking to attract volunteers? The answer, it seems to me, is not much. While at first glance Bill C-399 might seem like a good tool to encourage Canadians to volunteer some of their time to a cause they hold dear, this bill falls short of the mark. In my view, it would do nothing more than place an unnecessary administrative burden on charitable organizations and non-profit groups, all while having no effect on increasing the rate of volunteerism among Canadians. Evidence indicates it would likely cause a decrease in the number of volunteers.

While I feel this bill was introduced with the best of intentions, I am not convinced it would benefit Canadians. I urge my colleagues to think carefully before casting their vote in support of Bill C-399.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business is now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in a shocking and ill-advised decision earlier this year, Conservatives cancelled the community access program, an incredibly successful resource across rural and urban communities for Canadians with little or no access to a computer or the Internet.

The community access program gave funding to community centres and libraries to provide public terminals with Internet access as well as to offer skills training for their effective use. Initially this program was geared toward rural communities but grew to address the digital divide experienced by rural and urban Canadians alike, especially vulnerable Canadians who might not have access to a computer or the Internet.

In my riding of Guelph, our public library received \$6,800 annually to support 34 public access computers that were used daily by over 300 Guelphites. Communities from Newfoundland and Labrador to British Columbia and throughout the north received similar support.

There are so few elements of everyday life that no longer require a computer or access to the Internet, yet there are still tens of thousands of Canadians who cannot afford to have a computer at home, cannot afford regular Internet access, live in an area without reliable connectivity or are not technologically savvy.

Public libraries and other community access sites are the only sources for computer access for more than 25% of Canadians. These men and women rely on the computers and the access and assistance available to them when they go to the public library. Without this funding, how are libraries, especially those in smaller communities where the need may be greater, able to maintain these vital services for users?

Not through one large action but through many incremental yet significant cuts and changes, Conservatives are telling Canadians, "You are on your own".

Take, for instance, a young man or woman seeking employment through the Government of Canada's job bank. Previously they knew that if they had no computer or no means to access the web, they could pop down to the library or to certain communities centres, not anymore.

What about the extensive cuts in the budget that took front-line personnel out of communities across the country and shuttered the doors of Service Canada offices?

Canadians seeking services, from getting birth certificates to employment insurance, are now one step further removed than before. Online applications are fine if a person has access to a computer, but what about those who do not? Abandoned are vulnerable Canadians who are more likely to require government services in the first place. How about Canadians in rural communities without full connectivity who are already isolated from these services to begin with?

The same for cuts to VIA Rail in Guelph. Removing staff means bookings previously made at the train station will now need to be made online. I have had many senior citizens approach me, concerned because they either do not have a computer or they are not technologically savvy. Once, they might have gone to the train station. This will end. Alternatively, they might have gone to the Guelph public library where there are others around to give them a hand. This too will end.

Cutting both front-line personnel and removing additional assistance for accessibility is only isolating Canadians. Cutting the community access program is the epitome of the mean-spirited, ill-conceived policies we have come to expect from the Conservatives. However, I hold out hope that the government, realizing the error of its ways, might still have its conversion on the road to Damascus and reinstate this essential and successful program.

• (1910)

Hon. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. friend from Guelph for his question on the community access program. CAP was launched in 1995 when the Internet was in its infancy and only available to a small number of Canadians. Even then it was evident that it would be critical to Canada's future competitiveness. CAP was launched to make computers and the Internet accessible for many different communities that did not have access to home Internet.

It was designed to encourage Canadians to use computers, some for the very first time. In 1995, only about 10% of Canadians had Internet access and only 40% of them had a computer. I was in university at the time. I know many of the opposition members were in high school, some even in grade school and a few not even in school yet. However, the hon. member and I both remember pagers, typewriters and handwritten essays.

Today, most Canadians have Internet at home. In 2010, almost 80% of Canadians had access to the Internet at home. In fact, many Canadians have it on their tablets, smart phones, laptops and various other devices. They can also access Internet for free through local Internet hot spots like libraries and coffee shops.

Canadians are using the Internet in record numbers. According to some reports, we are world leaders in Internet use.

Many things have changed since 1995 and we must continuously review our programs to ensure they are efficient, effective and serving Canadians. The community access program was a good program in its time, but it has reached its objectives. That said, make no mistake, our government is committed to providing access to high speed Internet to more Canadians.

Adjournment Proceedings

There continues to be a gap between rural and urban Canadians in terms of access to leading-edge broadband and this is unacceptable. That is why our government has worked to expand access to rural broadband and increase access to broadband Internet across the country.

Our economic action plan included an expansion of broadband to cover almost 220,000 Canadians who did not have access to high-speed Internet before. Our government has been clear. Rural Canadians deserve the same reliable access as urban Canadians.

In the recent spectrum auction, the Minister of Industry announced a requirement for companies that buy spectrum to deploy into all areas of their customer base, not just big cities. This will bring LTE or fourth generation mobile services to more Canadians across the entire country.

New auctions for both the 700 and 2,500 megahertz bands have been announced with the 700 megahertz auction to be held next year. The auction is designed to support competition and investment by capping how much spectrum each company can purchase. This will enable at least four companies in each area to secure spectrum.

By ensuring greater choice for Canadians, we see more competition and ultimately lower costs for Canadian families.

Just this year, the CRTC published reports that costs to Canadians for broadband Internet and wireless Internet were cheaper in Canada than in the U.S.

Our world is becoming smaller and more digital. We need to plan for tomorrow, today. Our government has taken actions to provide more Internet service to Canadians, to ensure more competition and to keep costs low.

We are ensuring Canadians have the tools they need to succeed in this new global digital world.

• (1915)

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Mr. Speaker, the government itself acknowledges the long-standing success of this program. There is absolutely no legitimate excuse that can defend the cutting of such a vital, widely used program. It cannot deny that by cutting front-line service provision through Service Canada it is asking Canadians to go online for programs and applications, and yet it cut access to computers and the Internet.

While we are a more technologically savvy country than even a decade ago, removing access for the remaining most vulnerable Canadians is unacceptable.

There are still over 300 uses a day of the public access computers at the Guelph Public Library, tens of thousands across Canada. There are still too many rural communities in Canada where connectivity is an issue. We must stop isolating Canadians. I call on the government to do the right thing and restore the community access program. It is still needed.

Hon. Mike Lake: Mr. Speaker, I remind my hon. friend that the digital environment was very different when the community access program was launched over 17 years ago. Access to the Internet was limited and the government wanted to introduce to Canadians the

benefits of participating in a knowledge-based economy. The program has successfully met that objective.

Today we are funding internships where youth will be given useful experience in information and communications technology to allow them to successfully transition into the workplace. For Canadians who have been using a CAP site to access government services, Service Canada offers single window access to a wide range of Government of Canada programs and services.

Canadians can access these through almost 600 points of service located across the country. Furthermore, the resources of Industry Canada's computers for schools program continue to be available to schools and qualified non-profit groups. The program collects, repairs and refurbishes donated surplus computers from government and private sector resources. It then distributes them free of charge to schools, public libraries and not-for-profit learning organizations.

Through economic action plan 2012, our government is looking ahead and taking major steps forward to build on the strong foundation we have laid since 2006.

[*Translation*]

HEALTH

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP) Mr. Speaker, I rise today to go back to a very valid question that I asked in the House before the summer recess. At the end of April, I drew the minister's attention to the fact that, all spring, the NDP had asked the government a great many questions in order to get answers about the impact of the Service Canada cuts.

What I regretted at the time and what I regret to this day is that few concrete responses have come to the ears of Canadians, although Canadians deserve clarification on the employment insurance reform this government has set in motion. The government is clearly demonstrating a lack of transparency, whereas its first responsibility is precisely to be accountable to Canadians.

I spoke then about a culture of secrecy that prevails in the Conservative team. I maintain that that behaviour puts into clear and present danger the entire system on which our democratic institutions rest, institutions that should be built on mutual trust between the government and the people.

Over the past year, Canadians have unfortunately witnessed this unacceptable behaviour on a number of occasions. At the time, I asked the minister when Canadians would have the pleasure of an open, honest and communicative government. I stand here today on behalf of all Canadians in order to obtain more information in that regard.

Adjournment Proceedings

At present, we are well aware that in the history of Canada, there has never been a more controlling cabinet than the Prime Minister's cabinet when it comes to information. Information is disclosed in dribs and drabs. This is not surprising when we think of how things are managed, the F-35 fiasco, implementing the budget while keeping Canadians in the dark, and the many ethical lapses that the government must constantly cover up.

Examples of the lack of transparency on the part of this government abound, to the dismay of the people, who only want to know where they stand when it comes to reforms or cuts.

It is the same problem with employment insurance and its reform. Since Bill C-38 was introduced, Canadians have been given the broad general outline of an unwarranted reform but not the details and content of or, more particularly, the rationale for this reform. How can Canadians who are affected by these changes plan their futures or anticipate the possible impact on their quality of life or on their family life if they are kept in the dark?

How do we know whether seasonal workers in the regions who mainly make their living on the seasonal economy will have to be uprooted from their communities and forced into exile in a place where low-quality, full-time jobs are available? How do we know whether unemployed workers who find a job that pays 70% of their salary and who then lose their job again will not see their salary disappear by being obligated to accept a job that pays 70% of 70% of their initial salary? How do people avoid the trap of the downward spiral of poverty? How does a mother who is the head of a single-parent family get child care so that she can work a 40-hour week in a town that is an hour away by public transportation?

In an ideal world, Canada would have full employment from coast to coast to coast. However, in the real world, our economy depends on the global economic situation and one must assume that entire economic sectors—sectors that make Canada a prosperous and economically balanced country—involve seasonal work. This government must recognize and value that fact.

I would like the minister to take this opportunity to reassure Canadians of her government's desire for transparency in the management of its files, including that of employment insurance.

● (1920)

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to address the issue raised by the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles as it pertains to the modernization of employment insurance.

As we have said all along, the government is committed to delivering programs and services that are effective, aligned with the priorities of Canadians and financially sustainable over the long term. This means we must focus on core priorities, modernize service delivery and policy work, and streamline our operations. We are being accountable directly to Canadians for using their tax money wisely.

Automation speeds up claims processing and gets payments more quickly into the hands of people who need it, EI recipients.

[Translation]

Service Canada continues to closely follow the number of applications in order to ensure that we are providing the best service possible to the Canadians who rely on these benefits.

We have made significant progress and we will continue to build on this.

[English]

Over 60% of EI processing is partially or fully automated and we are on track in reaching our goal of 70%.

I also would like to talk about other ways the government has helped Canadian families in need.

Most recently, our government introduced the helping families in need act, which was tabled last week. The bill introduces necessary legislative changes to help hard-working Canadian families at the time when they need it the most. The bill would provide for a new 35-week EI benefit for parents and guardians of critically ill children. It also would provide for a non-EI benefit of \$350 a week for 35 weeks for parents of children who have been kidnapped or murdered.

I have met with the parents of critically ill children in the emergency department and I know the kind of horror they face. I also recognize that families are in distress when their child has been kidnapped or murdered. In these circumstances, it is clear why we are supporting families. It is so they need not worry about their job or their mortgage payment and they can focus on what matters, that being their child and their family.

Sadly, the NDP voted against the ways and means motion required to introduce this bill.

I would like to ask the NDP member opposite why the NDP members are not willing to support families during this toughest time in their lives, a time when they face the most difficult challenge.

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, I have a question in response to the parliamentary secretary's answer. Will the government take this money from the employment insurance fund? Does this mean that the Conservatives are making the most vulnerable even poorer? They are making cuts to the employment insurance program and reducing access, then they are using this money to finance other services. I completely agree with the service the Conservatives are proposing, but perhaps the money being used to finance it is not coming from the right place.

No one has any idea how the new concepts of suitable employment and obligations regarding job searches will work operationally. We need some clarification regarding the regulations. Once again, we know the outline without clearly knowing how the rules will be defined.

Adjournment Proceedings

We asked the minister responsible to give us answers on the regulations and to tell us how things will be applied, but we have yet to receive an answer.

The government has a perfect opportunity to be transparent and reconcile with the Canadian public. Can the minister confirm that Canadians will be consulted about the regulations before her party further damages our social programs and our economy?

• (1925)

[*English*]

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk more about why the NDP voted against helping parents when their child is murdered, missing or critically ill.

[*Translation*]

The member did not answer the question.

[*English*]

I cannot imagine how any party could stand and vote against such a measure to help families get through such hard and tragic times. I am astounded that the NDP have voted against EI for parents of sick children and at the same time want to impose a carbon tax that would raise prices on everything from gas to groceries on Canadians.

I will ask the question again. Why do the NDP members oppose parents caring for their children who are battling cancer? Why do they want to force parents to stay at work when their child has been kidnapped or murdered? Why has the NDP voted against all of our measures to help Canadian families in the toughest times that they have ever faced?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:26 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Tuesday, September 25, 2012

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Nuclear Terrorism Act

Mr. Van Loan (for the Minister of Justice)	10373
Bill S-9. Introduction and first reading	10373
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time).....	10373

Petitions

Rights of the Unborn

Mr. Chong	10373
-----------------	-------

Katimavik

Mr. Cullen	10373
------------------	-------

The Environment

Mr. Scarpaleggia	10373
------------------------	-------

Foreign Affairs

Mr. Scarpaleggia	10373
------------------------	-------

Rights of the Unborn

Mr. Breitreuz	10373
---------------------	-------

Abortion

Ms. Turmel	10373
------------------	-------

The Environment

Mr. Hsu	10373
---------------	-------

Rights of the Unborn

Mr. Woodworth	10374
---------------------	-------

Public Transit

Mr. Angus	10374
-----------------	-------

House of Commons

Mr. Lamoureux	10374
---------------------	-------

The Environment

Mr. Tilson	10374
------------------	-------

Katimavik

Mr. Côté	10374
----------------	-------

Abortion

Ms. Sitsabaiesan	10374
------------------------	-------

Rights of the Unborn

Mr. Hillyer	10374
-------------------	-------

Katimavik

Ms. Borg	10374
----------------	-------

Abortion

Ms. Borg	10374
----------------	-------

Bill C-38

Ms. May	10374
---------------	-------

Religious Freedom

Ms. May	10375
---------------	-------

The Environment

Ms. May	10375
---------------	-------

Rights of the Unborn

Mr. Cannan	10375
------------------	-------

International Cooperation

Mr. Pilon	10375
-----------------	-------

Rights of the Unborn

Mr. Bruinooge	10375
---------------------	-------

Committees of the House

Public Safety and National Security

Mr. Sorenson	10375
--------------------	-------

Questions on the Order Paper

Mr. Lukiwski	10375
--------------------	-------

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Business of Supply

Opposition Motion—Income Inequality

Mr. Rae	10375
---------------	-------

Motion	10375
--------------	-------

Mr. Chong	10377
-----------------	-------

Mr. Scott	10377
-----------------	-------

Mr. Coderre	10377
-------------------	-------

Mr. Cuzner	10378
------------------	-------

Mr. Del Mastro	10379
----------------------	-------

Mr. Angus	10379
-----------------	-------

Ms. Leitch	10380
------------------	-------

Mr. Côté	10381
----------------	-------

Mr. Cuzner	10381
------------------	-------

Mr. Shory	10382
-----------------	-------

Ms. Nash	10383
----------------	-------

Mr. Hsu	10383
---------------	-------

Mrs. McLeod	10384
-------------------	-------

Ms. Nash	10384
----------------	-------

Mr. Del Mastro	10385
----------------------	-------

Mr. Eyking	10385
------------------	-------

Mr. Angus	10386
-----------------	-------

Ms. Boutin-Sweet	10386
------------------------	-------

Mrs. Hughes	10387
-------------------	-------

Mr. Vellacott	10388
---------------------	-------

Mr. Boulerville	10388
-----------------------	-------

Ms. Foote	10388
-----------------	-------

Mrs. Hughes	10389
-------------------	-------

Mr. Eyking	10390
------------------	-------

Mr. Easter	10390
------------------	-------

Mr. Brahmí	10391
------------------	-------

Ms. Leitch	10391
------------------	-------

Mr. Mayes	10392
-----------------	-------

Mr. Goodale	10393
-------------------	-------

Mr. Angus	10394
-----------------	-------

Mr. Komarnicki	10394
----------------------	-------

Mr. Cuzner	10396
------------------	-------

Mr. Côté	10396
----------------	-------

Ms. Bennett	10396
-------------------	-------

Mr. Payne	10397
-----------------	-------

Mr. Dusseault	10398
---------------------	-------

Ms. May	10398
---------------	-------

Mr. Brison	10398
------------------	-------

Mr. Del Mastro	10400
----------------------	-------

Mr. Boulerville	10400
-----------------------	-------

Mr. Storseth	10400
--------------------	-------

Mr. Tremblay.....	10402
Mr. Lamoureux.....	10402
Mr. Butt.....	10403
Mr. Lamoureux.....	10404
Mr. Angus.....	10404
Mr. Simms.....	10404

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Anniversary Celebrations

Ms. May.....	10406
--------------	-------

London Paralympic Games

Mr. Leung.....	10406
----------------	-------

Right to Know Week

Ms. Borg.....	10406
---------------	-------

2012 eTown Award

Mr. Goguen.....	10406
-----------------	-------

Wallace Wood

Mr. Easter.....	10407
-----------------	-------

Langley's Seniors of the Year

Mr. Warawa.....	10407
-----------------	-------

People First Movement

Mr. Côté.....	10407
---------------	-------

Franco-Ontarian Day

Mr. Stanton.....	10407
------------------	-------

Fire in Saskatchewan Mine

Mr. Komarnicki.....	10407
---------------------	-------

Sudbury Classic Cruisers Car Club

Mr. Thibeault.....	10408
--------------------	-------

Flooding in the Philippines

Mr. Lizon.....	10408
----------------	-------

Walk for Breast Cancer

Ms. Turmel.....	10408
-----------------	-------

New Democratic Party of Canada

Ms. James.....	10408
----------------	-------

Child and Youth Nutrition Strategy

Ms. Duncan (Etobicoke North).....	10408
-----------------------------------	-------

New democratic Party of Canada

Mr. Sopuck.....	10409
-----------------	-------

Canadian Embassies

Mr. Nantel.....	10409
-----------------	-------

New Democratic Party of Canada

Mr. Gourde.....	10409
-----------------	-------

ORAL QUESTIONS

Foreign Investment

Mr. Mulcair.....	10409
Mr. Harper.....	10409

Foreign Affairs

Mr. Mulcair.....	10410
Mr. Harper.....	10410

Mr. Mulcair.....	10410
Mr. Harper.....	10410
Mr. Dewar.....	10410
Mr. Baird.....	10410
Mr. Dewar.....	10410
Mr. Baird.....	10410

The Economy

Mr. Rae.....	10410
Mr. Harper.....	10410
Mr. Rae.....	10410
Mr. Harper.....	10411

Human Rights

Mr. Rae.....	10411
Mr. Harper.....	10411

Employment Insurance

Mrs. Day.....	10411
Ms. Finley.....	10411
Ms. Charlton.....	10411
Ms. Finley.....	10411
Mr. Toone.....	10411
Ms. Finley.....	10411

Foreign Investment

Ms. LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard).....	10412
Mr. Lake.....	10412
Mr. Julian.....	10412
Mr. Lake.....	10412

Food Safety

Mr. Allen (Welland).....	10412
Mr. Ritz.....	10412
Ms. Brosseau.....	10412
Mr. Ritz.....	10412

Census

Mr. Aubin.....	10412
Mr. Lake.....	10413
Mr. Harris (Scarborough Southwest).....	10413
Mr. Lake.....	10413

Employment Insurance

Mr. Simms.....	10413
Ms. Finley.....	10413

Post-Secondary Education

Mr. Garneau.....	10413
Ms. Finley.....	10413

Pensions

Ms. Sgro.....	10414
Ms. Finley.....	10414

National Defence

Ms. Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue).....	10414
Mr. MacKay.....	10414
Mr. Harris (St. John's East).....	10414
Mr. MacKay.....	10414

Status of Women

Ms. Ashton.....	10414
Mr. Nicholson.....	10414

Ms. Boivin	10414
Mr. Nicholson	10415
International Trade	
Mr. Weston (Saint John)	10415
Mr. Menzies	10415
Privacy	
Ms. Borg	10415
Mr. Lake	10415
Ms. Borg	10415
Mr. Lake	10415
Government Accountability	
Mr. Angus	10415
Mr. Clement	10416
Mr. Angus	10416
Mr. Clement	10416
National Defence	
Mr. McKay	10416
Mr. MacKay	10416
Census	
Ms. Bennett	10416
Mr. Lake	10416
Sport	
Mr. Dubé	10416
Mr. Gosal	10416
Mr. Dubé	10417
Mr. Gosal	10417
Public Safety	
Mr. Norlock	10417
Mr. Toews	10417
Food Safety	
Mr. Valeriote	10417
Mr. Ritz	10417
Housing	
Ms. Boutin-Sweet	10417
Ms. Finley	10417
The Economy	
Mr. Warkentin	10418
Mr. Oliver	10418
Fisheries and Oceans	
Mrs. Hughes	10418
Mr. Ashfield	10418
Canadian Heritage	
Mr. Bellavance	10418
Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	10418
Presence in Gallery	
The Speaker	10418
Points of Order	
Statements by Members	
Mr. Rae	10418
Mr. Komarnicki	10418

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Business of Supply

Opposition Motion—Income Inequality

Motion	10419
Mr. Lamoureux	10419
Mr. Simms	10419
Mr. Del Mastro	10419
Ms. Doré Lefebvre	10419
Ms. Sgro	10419
Mr. Del Mastro	10421
Ms. Doré Lefebvre	10421
Mr. Lamoureux	10421
Ms. Adams	10422
Ms. Quach	10423
Mr. Lamoureux	10423
Mr. Aspin	10424
Mrs. McLeod	10424
Mr. Tremblay	10425
Mr. Casey	10425
Mr. Braid	10426
Ms. Duncan (Etobicoke North)	10426
Mr. Del Mastro	10427
Mr. Choquette	10428
Mr. Lamoureux	10428
Mr. Marston	10429
Mr. Boughen	10429
Mrs. Day	10430
Mr. Lamoureux	10431
Mr. Tremblay	10431
Ms. Doré Lefebvre	10431
Ms. Perreault	10431

Business of the House

Mr. O'Connor	10433
Motion	10433
(Motion agreed to)	10433

Business of Supply

Opposition Motion—Income Inequality

Motion	10433
Ms. Doré Lefebvre	10433
Mr. Tremblay	10433
Mr. Pacetti	10433
Mr. Eyking	10433
Mr. Marston	10435
Ms. Quach	10435
Motion negated	10437

Opposition Motion—Canadian Economy

Motion	10437
Motion negated	10438

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Income Tax Act

Mr. Larose	10438
Bill C-399, Second reading	10438
Mrs. Glover	10440
Mr. Simms	10440
Ms. Freeman	10440

Mrs. Glover	10441
Mr. Brison	10442
Mr. Mai	10443
Mr. Van Kesteren	10445

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

Government Programs

Mr. Valeriote	10446
---------------------	-------

Mr. Lake	10446
----------------	-------

Health

Mrs. Day	10447
----------------	-------

Ms. Leitch	10448
------------------	-------

MAIL  POSTE

Canada Post Corporation / Société canadienne des postes

Postage paid

Port payé

Lettermail

Poste-lettre

**1782711
Ottawa**

If undelivered, return COVER ONLY to:

Publishing and Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5

En cas de non-livraison,

retourner cette COUVERTURE SEULEMENT à :
Les Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Additional copies may be obtained from: Publishing and
Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5
Telephone: 613-941-5995 or 1-800-635-7943
Fax: 613-954-5779 or 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca
http://publications.gc.ca

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the
following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

On peut obtenir des copies supplémentaires en écrivant à : Les
Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5
Téléphone : 613-941-5995 ou 1-800-635-7943
Télécopieur : 613-954-5779 ou 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca
http://publications.gc.ca

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à
l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

