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(HANSARD)

Thursday, June 9, 2005

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, June 9, 2005

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE AND CANADIAN FORCES

Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, two copies of the National Defence and Canadian Forces ombudsman 2004-05 annual report to Parliament, "A Time of Change, A Time for Change".

* * *

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, I have the honour to table the government's response to 52 petitions.

* * *

• (1005)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FINANCE

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the thirteenth report of the Standing Committee on Finance which includes the report of the Subcommittee on Fiscal Imbalance, entitled "The Existence, Extent and Elimination of Canada's Imbalance".

I would like to point out that this is the first report on this subject matter to be tabled in the House of Commons. This is also the first consensus to emerge concerning the existence of the fiscal imbalance, as well as the ways to eliminate it in the future.

I thank all my hon. colleagues and all the witnesses who have contributed to making this a success. I encourage the government to pay heed to the sound recommendations contained in this report.

[*English*]

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. John Williams (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 15th report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts concerning Chapter 1—Internal Audit in Departments and Agencies of the November 2004 report of the Auditor General of Canada.

In accordance with Standing Order 109, your committee requests a government response within 120 days.

I also have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 16th report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts concerning Bill C-277, an act to amend the Auditor General Act (audit of accounts), and I intend to move concurrence in the report later this day.

[*Translation*]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Tom Wappel (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans regarding aquatic invasive species.

* * *

[*English*]

EXTENSION OF SITTING HOURS

Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 27, I move:

That, during the ten sitting days ending on June 23, except on any Friday, the sitting shall be extended to 12 midnight.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And more than five members having risen:

Routine Proceedings

The Speaker: At the request of the chief government whip and the chief opposition whip, the vote on the motion is deferred until Monday, June 13 at 6:15 p.m.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. John Williams (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among all parties and I believe you would find consent for the following motion. I move that the 16th report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, which asks for an additional 30 sitting days to consider Bill C-277, presented to the House earlier this day, be concurred in.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Edmonton—St. Albert have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

● (1010)

* * *

PETITIONS

MARRIAGE

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of a number of Canadians, including from my own riding of Mississauga South, concerning the subject of marriage.

The petitioners would like to draw to the attention of the House that fundamental matters of social policy should be made by elected members of Parliament and not by the unelected judiciary. They also want to remind us that Parliament has the sole jurisdiction to define marriage.

The petitioners therefore call upon Parliament to use all possible legislative and administrative measures, including the invocation of section 33 of the charter, commonly known as the notwithstanding clause, to preserve and to protect the current definition of marriage, being the legal union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

COMMUNITY ACCESS PROGRAM

Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have four petitions to present this morning, the first of which concerns a program called the community access program that provides high speed Internet service into many small communities in my riding and across Ontario.

As we know, access to Internet service is important for economic development and it is important to make sure that no Canadians are left behind in a changing economy. In this petition several of my

constituents urge the government to reconsider its decision to discontinue the CAP program.

MARRIAGE

Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have three other petitions representing the views of several hundred people in my riding regarding the definition of marriage. I must say that it is my understanding that many more of these petitions are on the way.

The petitioners support the efforts of our member of Parliament, being myself, to defend marriage as the lifelong union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

My constituents urge the Government of Canada to heed the views of Canadians. They urge the government to allow all of its member to vote freely on this motion.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Hon. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of petitioners, I am presenting the following petition on employment insurance.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to build a better, fairer employment insurance system by adopting the committee recommendations submitted on February 15, 2005.

AUTISM

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to present a petition signed by over 150 residents of Winnipeg who are very concerned about the incidence of autism spectrum disorder.

They comment on the number of children diagnosed with ASD and ask the House to consider ensuring that there is some provision for these children and their families to receive treatments that have proven to be effective. Those treatments include intensive behavioural intervention and applied behaviour analysis.

They ask that we work to ensure that these children can develop to the capacity they are able and to provide every Canadian with autism with the best treatment available.

* * *

[Translation]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Discussions have taken place between the parties and I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That at the conclusion of the present debate on the opposition motion, all questions necessary to dispose of this motion be deemed put, a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until the end of government orders on Tuesday, June 14, 2004.

The Speaker: It would then take place at midnight.

Does the parliamentary secretary have the consent of the House to present this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: There is no agreement. There will no doubt be further discussions.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

•(1015)

[Translation]

SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—STRATEGY TO HELP OLDER WORKERS

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ) moves:

That, in the opinion of the House, due to the increasing number of factory closures associated with globalization, the government should establish a strategy to help older workers who lose their jobs, a strategy that should include income support measures.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce this motion before the House today on behalf of the Bloc Québécois. Its purpose is to remedy, at least to some extent, the injustice done to a particular group of workers, namely older workers.

The motion before us has four features, which I will outline here to the House. First, of course, I should discuss the rationale behind this motion. It is obviously because of the increasing number of factory closures associated with globalization. This is something that the Bloc Québécois has studied in considerable depth over the last few months in order to make the government more aware of the need to prevent a situation caused by this new phenomenon.

The government should therefore develop a strategy for helping this particular group made up of older workers who have lost their jobs. This strategy should include a very specific measure to provide support when these people have the misfortune of losing their jobs.

Under its economic strategy, the Liberal government has cut employment insurance over the last few years. In doing this, it eliminated a program that was essential to the group of workers whom we are targeting today.

The social safety net used to provide an income through employment insurance for people who had the misfortune of losing their jobs in a climate of massive job losses, but it was abandoned in 1997. This has done a lot of harm to a particular segment of Canadian society, as well as to another segment that that I know a little better—the one in Quebec.

Originally, the component that we are discussing today was called the older workers assistance program. The definition of it was changed over the years and the name became the program for older worker adjustment or POWA. The nuances here are easy to see. By removing the idea of “assistance” for older workers, the government wanted to put more emphasis on these workers adapting and returning to work. We agree with that of course. But what we agree

Supply

with much less is the government abandoning its support for people who cannot retrain.

It is unacceptable to the Bloc Québécois that the federal government has done nothing for older workers, although they are in dire straits. The Bloc is calling for the implementation of an income support program for these workers. This program must be part of an overall strategy to assist older workers.

I will come back to this, since it has two major parts, as I indicated earlier: preparing older workers to re-enter the labour force, if possible, and the obvious need to support these workers and their families. Older people often have family and social responsibilities.

I want to provide some background information, a sort of review, to clearly show that we are not breaking new ground here. In existence from 1988 to 1997, the program for older worker adjustment was for people between the ages of 55 and 64 who met various criteria and had lost their jobs as a result of massive permanent layoffs.

•(1020)

So, in every group of workers affected by permanent massive layoffs, there were some older workers who were eligible for this particular program.

In a penny-pinching strategy still preferred by the Liberal Party until quite recently—which we will get to in a moment—the government, contrary to common sense, cut this program on March 31, 1997. Under federal-provincial agreements, including the Canada-Quebec agreement, the costs of this program were shared, 70% by the federal government and 30% by the provinces.

In 1996, the year before the program was eliminated, 11,700 people were still enrolled in the program as the result of 900 massive layoffs. After it disappeared, a new provision appeared. The program itself does not exist for these workers at present, but it has been amended numerous times by pilot projects that train workers for re-entry into the labour force. So, this income support, which was so essential, no longer exists.

It must also be pointed out that, statistically speaking, there are not that many unemployed older workers. In other words, proportionally, they are laid off less often than others. When they are laid off, however, they are unemployed longer. This is, of course, because when a worker is over 50, and even more so over 55, he has trouble getting back into the work force because employers are always looking to hire people who will be with them for a long time.

This trend has changed a little because of the shortage of jobs in certain fields, but the concrete reality for workers is unchanged.

The Employment Insurance Commission recently indicated that, even if older workers have benefited from a considerable increase in jobs in 2003-04, there is still an unemployment rate of 5.8%. When older workers lose their jobs, they have far greater difficulties in getting back into the work force. They are over-represented among the long-term unemployed, composing 21.3% of that group, yet only 12.5% of the work force. In other words, 12.5% of workers are over the age of 55, yet 21.3% of unemployed workers are over that age.

Supply

As I said, training programs for these workers are, without a doubt, good things. They do want to return to work, unless they have some health problem or other type of problem. The difficulty, however, lies with job openings. As a result, all this income assistance is now absent.

According to four union studies, the older workers are, the harder it is for them to access training. It is therefore harder on them if they lose their jobs because, on top of the lack of access to training, the skills they have acquired are out of phase with today's job requirements. The unions' studies have proven this.

• (1025)

The figures in this regard speak eloquently. Workers over 55 years of age account for only 3.5% of participants in the regular component of skills development, that is, training programs.

Of the critical mass of people taking training under existing programs, only 3.5% are older people.

The Employment Insurance Commission also notes that, as a general rule, older workers remain unemployed longer than do workers between the ages of 25 and 54. The figure is 33.6 weeks versus 23.3 weeks, and, in both cases, the workers involved are less well educated. In fact, 39.1% of older workers have not completed high school, as compared with 18.9% of workers between 25 and 54 years of age.

Workers have been calling for the reinstatement of the program for older worker adjustment since its abolition in 1997 by the Minister of Finance, the current Prime Minister.

I think there is some sort of consensus among all stakeholders concerned about employment to see that aging workers who have been laid off get some support when they lose their job.

It is important to say as well with respect to our motion today that it is a reminder about the form POWA took in 1993. Quebec and Ottawa renewed the 1988 agreement in January 1993. It addressed workers over the age of 55 who were included in massive layoffs and reduced from 15 to 13 the number of years of employment entitling them to take advantage of the program.

From this, a guide could be established for implementing the program.

Workers aged 55 to 60 could also draw, once their EI benefits had run out, a monthly benefit of between \$760 and \$1,000, determined by their income, on the condition, of course, that they remained available for work.

This contradicts the statements made on the other side of the House to the effect that older workers simply want an income while they wait for their old age pension, as it is popularly called.

That is totally wrong. The program we want to see ensures that the workers concerned, health and physical condition permitting, are available for work. When they are unable to find work, they could receive benefits.

For those aged 60 to 64, the benefits were set at \$700 because the RRQ benefits could be tacked on to their income. Previously, these benefits varied between \$750 and \$1,200.

And this did not prevent recipients from working, on the contrary. Only 40% of employment income in excess of \$300 could be deducted from the benefits under the program. This enabled older workers to re-enter the labour force on a temporary basis, part time or in what is termed today atypical jobs, while continuing to receive a portion of the POWA benefits to make up the difference, so they could have a decent income to live on.

That said, we want to reiterate that, more than ever, older workers need help. Since the beginning of this Parliament, the Bloc Québécois has called upon the government on three occasions to implement this program.

• (1030)

We were not the only ones to call upon the government. We were not the only ones to denounce its lack of action on the whole issue of globalization and the entry of products from China and India on the Canadian market.

On February 9—four months ago, that is pretty recent—the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, who was the Conservative member of Parliament for Newmarket—Aurora at the time, told the Speaker of the House of Commons the following, and I quote from the *Official Report of the Proceedings of the House of Commons*:

Mr. Speaker, I find it absolutely shocking that the trade minister yesterday said he would not weep for Canadian jobs lost to cheap labour markets in China and India.

Essentially what the minister has said is that he does not care about the hard-working Canadian men and women who might lose their jobs because the government has not shown enough leadership to ensure that the jobs stay here in the first place. What is the minister going to do to keep jobs here in Canada and create new jobs here in Canada?

Today, I am asking her: What would be her answer to the question that she put four months ago? She is now in a position to answer it. If she thought it was outrageous four months ago, I want to know if the principles in which she takes pride still make her feel that it is outrageous, now that she has crossed the floor of the House. Is what was immoral four months ago now acceptable because she has since changed parties?

This calls for an answer, and we certainly hope that the new minister will answer today the question that she put to the minister on February 9.

The cost of an improved POWA for the federal government would be around \$55 million for the first year, and \$75 million for subsequent years. This estimate is confirmed by a number of economists. The caucus of the Liberal Party of Canada, of which the new minister is now a member, also expressed its support for restoring POWA. Here is an excerpt from the October 21, 2004 edition of the Trois-Rivières daily *Le Nouvelliste*, barely six months ago:

The Liberal caucus wants to restore the program for older worker adjustment.

Supply

Yesterday, the federal Liberals' Quebec caucus asked the Minister of Human Resources, Joe Volpe, to re-introduce the program for older worker adjustment.

The federal Liberals' Quebec caucus added:

This program will allow workers aged 55 and over, who have low skill levels and who lost their jobs, to bridge the gap between the time they find themselves unemployed and their retirement.

I have another interesting quote. I am directing my comments to people who pride themselves in having principles, to see if they also keep their word. This is from a famous character in this House, and I wonder if he keeps his word:

According to MP Denis Coderre, this program worked well at the time, but was abolished because of cuts.

This is definitely not helping the unemployed.

Mr. Coderre contends that the disruption, in terms of layoffs, caused by globalization in the primary clothing and textile industry, will require the government to look at the plight of older workers, as it did for seasonal workers.

• (1035)

On February 15, the standing committee, where all parties are represented, submitted a report in which recommendation N° 13, is exactly along the same lines as our motion today. This is why I am asking all parliamentarians here to support this motion.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am trying to get the consent of the House. There was a little bit of confusion earlier.

I repeat. Discussions have taken place between all parties and I believe that you will find consent for the following motion:

That at the conclusion of the present debate on today's Opposition Motion, all questions necessary to dispose of this motion be deemed to have been put and a recorded division deemed demanded and deferred until 9:59 p.m. on Tuesday, June 14, 2005.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Translation]

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Social Development (Social Economy), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened to the hon. member's speech with great interest. I know his strong commitment to older workers. I share his feelings for those workers.

In the course of his speech, he said that the government wants workers of a certain age to say home. That is not the case at all. Quite the contrary, in fact it was our government that has created the most jobs, including in Quebec. We want people to work. We do not want them to stay home and cash cheques. We want to create opportunities for them. That is why we developed pilot projects for workers who lose their jobs.

In my riding of Ahuntsic, there are two organizations that work to create opportunities for people who have lost their jobs, including those in the textile and apparel industry. I have been defending people who lose their jobs since the first day I was elected to this place.

I would like to ask a question of my colleague. Would he admit that we want to create jobs, for example, in the high technology

sector? Let us take the textile and apparel industry as an example. There are few jobs where sewing machines are used, but new technology has been introduced to the factories.

There are ways to train people who have always worked in the same sector and always done their job the same way. On the other hand, labour force training is the responsibility of Quebec and the other provinces. I should mention here that we are about to sign an agreement on the subject with Ontario. Cooperation is necessary between the provinces, including Quebec, and the federal government.

Would the hon. member admit that such cooperation is needed to ensure training of those workers so they can find new jobs?

• (1040)

Mr. Yves Lessard: Madam Speaker, I also want to thank the parliamentary secretary for her question. She is quite right about the need to continue the job training and adjustment programs.

I would like to hear what my colleague says about the income needed by people who lose their jobs and are entitled to employment insurance benefits—when they are entitled to them, because let us remember that only 38% of people who contribute to employment insurance can expect to receive benefits.

However, from the time their EI benefits end until the time they receive their income security cheque, if they are not lucky enough to find another job, must I understand that the position of the member's party is to leave a void and leave these people without any income?

In response to her question, we are taking the following option: we must first recognize that they have no income from the time their EI benefits end. Second, do they receive any income or not? Also, have there been experiences in the past?

Yes, and this was done at the Canadian government level through the employment insurance program. This was a program that produced very positive results and was inexpensive. When this program was terminated in March 1997, it was costing \$21 million out of a budget of approximately \$17 billion. Today, this program would cost between \$50 million and \$60 million, if we were to start this year or later, out of a budget that totalled \$16.3 billion last year.

That is how we respond to the question that was asked. I will conclude my answer by asking another question. Does the Liberal Party agree with us that we must help these people? If it says no, the answer must not stop there. It must tell us why it would abandon these people, when the money is available and the needs are there. There are people now in cabinet who agreed with this only four months ago.

*Supply**[English]*

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, CPC): Madam Speaker, I wish to congratulate the member for bringing forth a resolution such as this for debate. It is an issue that should be debated in the House. There are many older people, who have contributed to this country for years, being displaced from their jobs not only because of globalization. There are other factors as well.

We have, because of pressures today from China in particular, seen even in the fishing industry companies not being able to compete in the marketplace. This means a displacement of workers in textiles, the fishery and paper mills in our own province because of globalization to a point but also because of other factors. There are major industries closing down and displacing many older workers.

Young people are usually not a problem. They can be retrained. They can pack up and go somewhere else. However, people at a certain age who have invested everything where they live, who knew they had a job at home years ago did not worry too much about education, and who are now 55 to 60 years of age and have absolutely nowhere to go, have been neglected. I think that is terrible.

In light of displaced workers there is one little catch which a lot of people had problems with in a similar program some years ago. It just went on age alone. There was a minimum of so many working years and a certain age. We had people who had worked perhaps 35 years in a factory, but because they had started very young they were not 55 or 60 years of age, or whatever the cutoff was, and got nothing. Whereas other people who worked for 3 or 4 years got benefits until they received their old age pension. I do not think that is fair. I would like the member's opinion on that.

•(1045)

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his most relevant question.

Age was not mentioned. If the House passes our motion and establishes a committee to develop a strategy and agree on a mechanism, then we will have to set the parameters.

To reassure my colleague, there are some very specific indicators. First, there was the age of 55 years which was established in the former program and which did not generate outlandish costs, as I mentioned earlier.

In its recommendations, the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities proposes 50 years. The point raised by our colleague is the following. For a person, for instance, who started to work at a very early age, who has paid EI premiums all his or her life and who will soon turn 45, 47, 48 or 49 years of age, could there be a mechanism allowing that person to receive that benefit nonetheless?

Obviously, that person will be in a better position to return to the labour market if he or she is 45 or 50 years old. We do not want that mechanism to be in place today. However, it is already clear that there are very specific indicators that can tell us what kind of rules should be put in place in that regard.

For instance, if the age was set at 50 years, which means 5 years younger, people in that age bracket are more likely to go back to work than those who are over 55 years old. The cost is thus much lower and not a lot of additional costs are generated.

I share your view that one has to take into account the situation of those people who have spent 30 or 35 years of their life in the labour market and who find themselves in a financial dead end today.

[English]

Hon. Belinda Stronach (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and Minister responsible for Democratic Renewal, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, I am pleased to participate in this discussion. The motion presented by the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas talks about establishing a strategy to help older workers who lose their jobs and a strategy that should include income support measures. The Government of Canada has already begun helping older workers to meet the challenges they face following loss of their employment.

Today's labour market is changing like never before and it is no stretch to say that globalization is one of the main factors spurring on such an evolution. Obviously, living in a global village has also opened the door to a wide world of opportunities. Such opportunities have allowed all of us, from governments to business and individual citizens, to build a better society in order to enhance our understanding of the world around us and to participate in the building of a country whose economy is thriving and prosperous.

However, globalization does have its challenges. An aggressive global marketplace means that productivity and competitiveness are crucial. Canadians are very successful in this global marketplace. Just take a look at our unemployment rate. In fact, during this period of intensifying global competitiveness, our unemployment rate has dropped from 12.1% in 1992 to 6.8% today.

The Government of Canada knows that globalization also means change. We cannot ignore the fact that certain communities, certain sectors and some Canadians face real challenges. Nor can we ignore the fact that our labour force which began to slow in the 1980s will slow even more as older baby boomers begin to retire. In the next 10 years retirement will create more job openings and growth in our economy. In fact, by 2013 retirements are expected to rise to 470,000 and by that same year should account for 75% of all new job openings.

Mindful of such statistics and factors, the Government of Canada has created tools and programs to help Canadians. Whenever Canadians are affected by major labour market adjustments, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, in partnership with other departments and with provincial and territorial governments, is there to respond quickly and effectively.

The Government of Canada is aware that supports for workers who experience unemployment are critical to maintain the quality of life for themselves and their families, to allow time for them to adjust, gain new skills if necessary, and to move on to new employment and to help stabilize the economies of communities that are affected by a downturn in employment. To this end more than \$9 billion has already been provided in EI income benefits to people who lost their jobs last year and this does not include the over \$4 billion paid in special benefits. Nearly \$1.2 billion went to workers aged 55 and over. Overall, 186,000 older workers received help.

As my colleagues in the House already know, employment insurance provides temporary income support to insured people in Canada who involuntarily lose their jobs. It is specifically designed to be responsive to changes in labour markets by adjusting entrance requirements and the duration of entitlement to regular benefits when regional unemployment rates change. Whenever Canadian communities are faced with economic hardship, HRSDC is quick to get involved to ensure that those workers who are affected receive the benefits to which they are entitled.

For example, officials from a local HRSDC office will usually get in touch with the affected companies and immediately offer their assistance. This often includes helping employees make their claims for EI benefits and processing those claims as quickly as possible. Rapid processing of EI claims is important and not just for financial support purposes. The sooner workers receive compensation, the sooner they become eligible for active employment measures.

•(1050)

The Government of Canada knows that income support is not enough. That is why we provided \$2.2 billion in active measures to help Canadians prepare for new jobs. We know what workers want most is to re-enter the workforce quickly. Losing a job is not the equivalent of losing the desire to work. Given our globalized economy and demographic challenges, we need the skills and the experience that our older workers bring to the workplace.

What are we doing about it? As I said, we spent \$2.2 billion in collaboration with the provinces and the territories. These funds support a wide range of programs across Canada that are tailored to meet the needs of the local communities. For example, unemployed workers can receive up to three years of training if they need skills upgrading in order to find new and lasting employment. If they choose to start a new business, they can receive income support for up to one year, or longer if disabled.

Programs are also in place for people who just need new or additional work experience to improve their chances of finding permanent employment, but more than ever, we know that the world has changed since our most experienced workers entered the workplace.

Today, the small things matter. Writing a resumé, preparing for an interview, and understanding job search strategies all play a big role in finding a new job. We are there working in partnership with the provinces and the territories, employers and communities to meet these challenges.

Let me talk a little bit about the older workers pilot project initiative. In addition to EI measures we have been working in close

Supply

collaboration with the provinces and the territories to test new and innovative approaches to help older workers to find and retain employment.

Over the past six years the government has invested over \$50 million in the older workers pilot project initiative. I am pleased to inform the House that the initiative was recently extended to May 2006 and has been enriched by \$5 million. The provinces that participated in the initiative are Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Quebec, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories.

I would like to present two examples of these projects. First, an agriculture awareness community service program on the Bay de Verde Peninsula that saw 12 unemployed workers between the ages of 55 and 64 learn nursery skills and the use of related modern technologies. Second, the creation and delivery of a broad training initiative that prepared 40 workers, aged over 50, unemployed due to fish plant closures, to re-enter the workforce in Nova Scotia's Guysborough County.

There are many more projects under way and many more Canadians are re-entering the workplace, thanks to the older workers pilot project initiative.

There is also the workplace skills strategy. Our approach to help working Canadians does not end there. The Government of Canada wants to support all Canadian workers to help them to keep working. In today's economy, the best way for them to stay employed is to upgrade and refine old skills and to develop new ones so they can better adapt to the changing circumstances of our workplaces.

Because our country's future competitiveness rests largely on the shoulders of productive, high performance workplaces that support skills development, the Government of Canada announced in the last Speech from the Throne a workplace skills strategy. It will ensure that the Canadian workforce is highly skilled, adaptable and resilient, that will add to a flexible and efficient labour market, and will respond to the needs of employers to ensure that our workplaces are productive, innovative and competitive.

Budget 2005 set aside \$125 million over three years to begin implementing our plan to strengthen the skills of Canadian workers. This strategy is based on extensive research conducted in recent years as well as advice we have received from stakeholders like the provinces, employers, unions and learning institutions.

Supply

Sector councils have provided valuable advice on how to best develop and utilize the skills and abilities of Canadians. They have led the way in anticipating and planning for workforce adjustments. Across Canada, some 30 national sector councils bring together business, labour, educational stakeholders and key industries to identify and address common human resources and skills issues, and to find solutions that benefit each of those particular sectors.

These councils are instrumental in giving Canadians a cutting edge lead into the 21st century workplace by ensuring that current workers and those seeking employment are well prepared for the challenges of this rapidly evolving labour market. The textile and apparel sectors in Quebec offer perfect examples of these industries trying to adapt to an increasingly globalized world.

• (1055)

Recently we invested \$5.9 million in the Textiles Human Resources Council and \$3.4 million in the Apparel Human Resources Council. We recognize the significant place their industries occupy in this economy. Few sectors can boast a better investment record than the textile industry. As a direct consequence of its position at the forefront of innovation, firms have become globally competitive players carrying out new international markets. Yet despite its very progressive place in the world market, the textile industry is still adapting.

Likewise, the apparel industry, with a workforce of 65,000 people and exports of \$3.5 billion in goods annually, is at the cutting edge of this global economy. However, with the entry of China into the WTO and the lifting of all import quotas, the apparel industry is going through an intense restructuring phase. However, this sector is responding to the adjustment challenges by taking steps to attract young people, recruit skilled workers, as well as to retain the current workforce.

Both the Textiles Human Resources Council and the Apparel Human Resources Council have set themselves at the forefront of these issues affecting their respective industries. They are providing investments in people that yield significant returns for individuals, industry, the economy and society at large, and the other 28 sector councils are doing the same.

Employment among older workers has grown steadily since the mid-1990s and has generally outpaced growth among workers aged between 25 and 54, as well as youth aged between 15 and 24. In fact the unemployment rate for workers aged 45 and over currently stands at 5.4% while the unemployment rate for Canadians aged between 55 and 64 is currently holding steady at 5.9%. Both figures are slightly lower than the national unemployment rate at 6.8%.

These numbers are a clear indication that Canada's older workers still have a valuable place in our labour market, so we should be doing even more to promote greater awareness of older workers, not less. For example, we can make it easier for older adults to access training. We can advance the recruitment of older adults. We can increase recognition of credentials within Canada to facilitate the labour movement. Each of these strategies will help us to enhance opportunities for older workers rather than to limit them.

Recognizing that the government of Canada already provides substantial income support to older workers through the EI program

and is actively engaged with the provinces and with the territories in assessing ways to improve our already significant active re-employment measure, I am pleased to support this motion which calls for an older worker strategy.

• (1100)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask a couple of questions of the minister about long term strategies for dealing with older workers. I thank our colleagues from the Bloc for having brought this to the fore, because dealing with an aging workforce is a major issue.

However, what I feel needs to be discussed is broadening this issue out into the big picture. We are moving toward the perfect storm for pensions. We have a number of issues that are all coming to the fore. First, we have an aging workforce. Second are the issues of globalization, outsourcing of our jobs and having to go up against countries like China in numerous sectors. Third, the fundamental issue that has to be put into the equation is we have had an agenda in corporate Canada for the last generation where we have moved from having employees paying into pensions toward contract workers.

In my generation, I could probably count on one hand people I know who pay into pensions on a regular basis. Most people in my generation have been working on contract with various jobs. They move from here to there. Some years they make some money and they put it aside, but when the times are bad they lose those savings. In my age group, mid-forties, I find that many people have not paid any significant amounts into pensions.

What is the long term strategy of the government for dealing with the fact that fewer and fewer people pay steadily into a pension fund?

We have an aging workforce and we are having to deal with the factors of globalization. The issue will start to hit very seriously in the next few years. We see a crisis now in segments with older workers. What is the long term vision to ensure that we have a pension fund for all Canadians that will be maintained well into this coming century?

Hon. Belinda Stronach: Madam Speaker, the goal at the end of the day is to provide a better quality of life for all Canadians. In particular, we are discussing older Canadians. I appreciate the member's comments and I will ensure that we take those comments into consideration when we look at the overall comprehensive strategy. I will be happy to discuss that in great detail with my colleagues to ensure we look at things in a comprehensive way.

The goal at the end of the day is to provide a better quality of life for seniors and for older workers. We have done a number of things to address that, both as it relates to temporary income support program, which applies basically to all Canadians, and through active measures, in particular the pilot programs that are currently underway and which have been extended until May 2006.

The conclusion of those pilot programs should come out in November. They will form a great input or the basis for the strategy that we are to develop as we go forward.

The goal is a better quality of life and how can we enable more mature citizens to upgrade their skills to adapt to the changes in the workplace and in the increased competition through globalization and to ensure that their skills are relevant so at the end of the day they are able to use those skills to find a good quality job, if they wish to do so.

• (1105)

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for her explanation. I would, however, like her to reconsider her conclusion.

Did I understand correctly that the minister would support the Bloc motion? That is my first question. If so, we are very pleased. If applicable, I would like to know her understanding of the motion and her perspective on its application.

The second part of my question is an invitation to the minister. It supports her speech on the following principle: just because someone loses their job does not mean they lose the desire to work. Her colleagues applauded when she made that comment. I find that quite worrisome. This argument seems to be based on prejudice. Older workers do not find new jobs, not because they do not want to work.

I do not know whether the minister fully realizes that there are two sides to helping older workers. First, professional training is needed to help the workers acquire new skills. We realize programs are already in place for this. Today's motion is to help older workers who do not manage to find work, yet have the desire to do so. Almost all of them want to work.

[English]

Hon. Belinda Stronach: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to say that we support the motion. As the workforce is aging, we believe we must take a look at this and do everything we possibly can. We have to find out how we can best enable more mature workers to continue working.

We support the motion. I welcome all ideas as we develop the strategy. We have done quite a bit of work already, recognizing that the conclusions out of the pilot project will come forward in November. They will form good input. They also will be the basis on which to build on that strategy.

I welcome good ideas on how we can better enable more mature workers to be contributors to the economy, to achieve economic freedom and independence and to build a better quality of life.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I take this opportunity to congratulate the minister on her appointment. She has taken over one of the more difficult ministries. The whole workforce development is an extremely important issue for our Canadian economy and society. As we have seen over the last several weeks, she has a very thorough grasp of this file. It is my belief that the House, the government and all Canadians will benefit as a result.

I appreciated her speech and I am pleased to see that the minister has supported the resolution. However, I find it resolution rather specific. I agree with her it should be supported, but it deals with older workers. We also have disabled workers, workers from visible

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minorities, aboriginal workers and workers from the regions. We also are dealing with a demographic time bomb as we look into the future, as the minister is aware.

Although she did support the resolution, is this not part of an overall strategy to deal with the entire Canadian workforce?

• (1110)

Hon. Belinda Stronach: Madam Speaker, as a principle, we are moving more toward a concept of lifelong learning. That means investing in our young people and those employees who currently have a job so they can upgrade their skills to meet the challenges of the workplace. It also means taking a look at older workers, how they can stay in the workplace, upgrade their skills and work with employers to ensure the investment is there as workers approach retirement years.

We are looking at it in a comprehensive way, and that would be lifelong learning. However, that lifelong learning will be incorporated into our workplace skills strategy, which we are currently refining and working on and which we should be able to release fairly soon.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened to the minister's speech and I have a few observations.

It is a matter of money being paid to the regions to help people better develop their job-related skills, following technological changes, for example. I am completely in favour of that. This goes well with the Phase II employment insurance programs.

The Bloc motion also mentions plant closures. The reality in the regions, in my riding or in the Gaspé, is that fish plants are closing, leaving 50 or 55 year olds, who do not have a high school diploma, without work. There is a lot of catching up to do before those people can go back to work.

I would like the minister's opinion. The strategy is for older workers who have lost their job. Is the government really going to spend money on training people who are close to retirement age? That is one of the biggest problems in many of the regions where the unemployment rate is 20% or more. These are my examples. I would like to know the minister's thoughts on this.

[English]

Hon. Belinda Stronach: Madam Speaker, factory closures happen for a number of reasons. Broadly based, there is increased global competition. How will Canada compete in this global economy?

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I strongly believe we must invest in people and build the human capital. That is more of a concept of lifelong learning. Everybody needs a good quality job at the end of the day. We have to invest in young people, ensure they get the right early start in life and have access to education. As they enter the workforce, we also have to ensure that they continuously upgrade their skills.

It is not just about identifying programs for workers who have lost their jobs. There are programs in place for that. This is looking at it in a more comprehensive way such as how people can continuously upgrade their skills in life as the demands of this global economy force us to do so, as competition increases and we have to be more productive. There are a number of ways to be more productive, but an important part of that is investing in people so people build the knowledge base and the skills base that allow them to compete for good quality jobs and so business has access to a highly qualified and skilled workforce to allow it to compete in the global marketplace.

Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am happy to have the opportunity to speak to the motion today. In the last couple of weeks we have had two or three opportunities to talk about employment, employment insurance benefits, worker training and today more specifically about older workers in Canada. I also had the opportunity to work with the member for Chambly—Borduas on the human resources committee and I am well aware of his interest in this area.

I think we would all agree that while the federal government is dealing with job opportunities for all workers in Canada, the employment insurance program is probably one of the most important mechanisms we have to address these issues. In committee over the past few months we spent a lot of time talking about the future of EI and about changes that need to be made to the program to ensure that it is doing the job it is supposed to do and, quite frankly, to ensure that the government is not continuing to syphon billions of dollars out of the program.

In committee the three opposition parties agree on several things. The first thing we all agree on is that there should be a separate EI account, that basically the dollars taken from employers and employees to fund EI should be set aside for the benefit of employers and employees and should not be within easy access of the federal government.

Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Vancouver Island North.

The three opposition parties agree that we need to have a separate account. Quite frankly, it appears that government members do not wholeheartedly support that idea and if they do it is quite grudgingly.

Second, I think all opposition parties agree that the government should make more of an effort to actually respect the intent of the EI Act, which is that there should be a balancing in EI, that the dollars coming into the program should be equivalent to the dollars flowing out of it.

Unfortunately, for the last 10 years the Liberal government has been deliberately keeping premiums high, taking more dollars than are necessary, both from workers and employers, while at the same time reducing payouts. It has not been setting aside those dollars for

the future for employers and workers but rather using that money, which is in general revenues, to fund all sorts of programs that the Auditor General makes comments on a regular basis.

All opposition parties agree that EI needs to be brought into balance, and part of that is addressing the premium side and the other part is addressing the amount of dollars that get paid out.

The third point I was recently quite disturbed to discover and one which the other parties do not agree with my party on is that before we can come up with a package of changes that would actually bring EI into balance, I believe we need accurate and detailed costing of those changes. If we are going to change the number of weeks required for eligibility, we need to have accurate information in terms of what that might cost.

The NDP recently had a motion before the House regarding the best 12 weeks. The motion did not refer to the best 12 continuous weeks. I guess arguably it could be the first week, the fifth week, the seventh week and the ninth week over a period of time. For people who work irregular hours, such as six days on and six days off or 12 hour shifts, they would have a checkered income pattern from week to week. I had a concern that there was an opportunity for mischief there. I would have been much more interested in a proposal that said 12 continuous weeks rather than just the best 12 weeks.

We also discussed whether the percentage of income should be increased to 60% and whether there should be different rules in different parts of the country based on local unemployment rates.

I moved a motion in committee requesting that the Department of Finance develop an econometric model to allow us to assess the impacts of these proposed changes, and not just on a one off basis, but that if we were going to introduce five or six significant changes at the same time, we would need to know what the actual interactive result of that would be and what the total cost of that would be.

• (1115)

I am confident that those estimates can be generated. I think it is prudent and responsible for all members of our committee, regardless of what side of the issue we are on, that we should be not only requiring but actually demanding detailed information in terms of what the costs are going to be.

That is why, quite frankly, I was shocked that none of the other parties suggested or supported my motion at committee to get that information provided for us.

Where my party parts company with both the Bloc and the NDP is that we think there should be a balanced approach where we look at the premium side as well as the payout side. We think that EI premiums are essentially a payroll tax.

I think everyone in the country recognizes that payroll taxes are job killers. Even the current Prime Minister when he was finance minister recognized the point that as we increase payroll taxes we eliminate jobs across the country. Obviously, if that is true, the corollary is true as well which is that if we reduce payroll taxes that actually encourages job creation.

We as Conservatives think that side of the equation bears closer scrutiny. There is a large surplus, a notional surplus of \$46 billion. Over the past five or ten years the government has taken \$46 billion from employers and employees. Every time the government takes a couple of billion it throws a chit into the notional account. Basically, it is an IOU \$1 billion or IOU \$3 billion.

I have serious concerns that the government is trying to figure out a way to wiggle out of that commitment. I believe it will try to establish some new fund and then argue that because it actually owes the money to itself that it does not really owe it to anyone.

We have heard the parliamentary secretary for the minister argue in committee that to cut a cheque for \$46 billion and deposit it in this account would cause massive chaos in the Canadian economy and in the government finances, seeming to suggest that we ought not do that and that it would be easier if we just kind of walked away from that contribution.

I reminded the parliamentary secretary on those occasions that the money did not belong to him nor to the Government of Canada, that it actually belonged to the workers and the employers. I said that it was their money and that it should be set aside for their benefit.

If, quite frankly, repayment of that money into a separate EI account causes there to be a large amount of money in that account, perhaps in the short term a contribution holiday would be the right way to approach this. Would it not be great if there were dollars set aside so that both employees and employers had a holiday from paying premiums for the next two, three or four years and were able to actually keep more of their own money?

I think there are a variety of ways to deal with rebalancing the EI system. We have two debates going on here. One which, in my opinion, is somewhat dishonest, and that being that we cannot put the money into that account. I think that should happen.

The second debate, which I think is an honest debate and one which we may agree to disagree, is how we are going to find that balance. Are we only going to increase expenditures from the program, which it appears to me is the interest of both the Bloc and the NDP, or are we going to look at the expenditure side and try to balance it with some changes on the contribution side as well and find something that actually works, not only for those people who have lost their jobs but that it continues to work for those people who continue to have jobs or for those people who continue to create jobs in Canada?

I think that is where we are and where we should be. My sense and my challenge to my colleagues in the opposition parties is, first, let us work together to get this separate account established; second, let us work together to force the Liberal government to keep its commitment and to actually return the dollars, the \$46 billion, that have been taken from workers and from employers in Canada; and third, let us have this discussion and get the information in terms of how much different changes will cost, and then we can have discussions on what the right balance will be.

A very important part of that discussion obviously would be older workers and older workers in areas with no opportunities. For that reason I am happy to support the motion today. However this is only one small piece of a larger puzzle and we should not lose sight of the

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first two important points. My sense is that the government would like to get us trapped in these small disputes so it can walk away from its much larger commitment, which is to the workers and employers in Canada.

• (1120)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Madam Speaker, I have listened to my colleague's speech with interest. As far as employment insurance is concerned, the lack of an independent fund obviously constitutes a basic problem. In addition, the fact that money contributed by the workers of Quebec and Canada is being used for purposes other than the EI program is a major and fundamental problem, and one that has been raised.

Moreover, a few weeks ago, when the new Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development was still a Conservative, she voted in favour of such a motion. Now that she is on the Liberal side, she has decided to change her mind. She has not given us any worthwhile explanation for this rather surprising about-face.

I would like to have some other explanations from my colleague as well. We know the program we are proposing would of course provide active measures to enable older workers to find jobs. It would also provide income support measures for those unable to do so. They would therefore have access to bridging until they reached the age for the Quebec or Canada pension plan or the old age pension.

Does the member know that the cost of such a program is around \$55 million for the first year, and \$75 million for subsequent years? Not a huge amount compared to the total in the EI fund.

This morning, we heard some good news: the government will be voting in favour of our motion. What is my colleague's reaction to the fact that the government did not reinstate that long-gone program when the Liberals came back in?

Globalization has positive consequences, as we know, but it also has negative ones. Would putting such a program into place not be doing the right thing for workers in the sectors most penalized by it? Moreover, given the estimated cost of such a program, there ought not to be any delay. The government should be able to implement it as quickly as possible.

• (1125)

[*English*]

Mr. Barry Devolin: Madam Speaker, with regard to the cost of this program, \$55 million in the first year and \$75 million in subsequent years, and the need to specifically focus on older workers, I have two or three comments.

First, I agree and recognize that there is an issue for older workers who lose their jobs. They have difficulty in re-entering the workforce. When I read the motion, I see that it refers specifically to factory closures associated with globalization. I would argue that our concern is actually broader than this, in that we are concerned with all older workers who have lost their jobs, whether it is in factories or in small businesses or other enterprises in communities.

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My riding in central Ontario, which is quite rural and has a very high percentage of older people, also has a relatively high unemployment rate. Many of the unemployed older people in my riding would not be such as a result of globalization or factory closings, but as a result of other more local factors. That is my first point. I think we need to look at the needs of older workers in a broader context rather than focusing specifically on factory closures.

In terms of the relatively small number of dollars involved here, I must apologize, in that I am a rookie member and have been here less than a year and, as such, \$55 million still sounds like a big number to me, although I recognize that in this place \$50 million or \$100 million gets tossed around pretty easily. My point has been in terms of the costing. I think investigation bears this out: if there are several components to the cost structure, including percentage of wages, number of weeks a person must work, number of weeks of benefits to be paid, local unemployment rate and age of workers, in that model if we only change one factor it is relatively easy to determine what the cost of that would be.

My concern has been about simultaneously changing three or four variables in that equation. The actual impact of that will probably be different than merely adding up what the individual costs would be. In fact, I would argue that the total cost would inevitably be more than the individual costs. My point about costs is that if we are going to change a lot of things I think we need to have accurate information on what the total cost would be.

● (1130)

Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am quite happy to be speaking to this Bloc motion today. This whole area of retraining of older workers is an area with which my part of the country has had quite a bit of experience. On some occasions people have been placed on the unemployment ranks as a direct result of federal actions and sometimes as a direct result of federal inaction, and sometimes for other reasons.

I can give some good examples of that. Certainly, in the fishing section my riding was hit harder than any other riding on the west coast. This occurred when we had the so-called Mifflin plan, which downsized the fishing sector. It was a federal buyout of commercial fishing licences. It reduced the number of licensed boats and licensed fishermen in many communities by huge numbers, sometimes up to 90%.

This displacement of workers was addressed with a federal program which was administered by a group set up locally to administer and run programs. This ran for several years. I think the Mifflin plan was introduced in the mid-nineties. This plan ran for three or four years. It tried to give people skills that they did not currently have to make them available for alternate work. It had a very high placement rate.

The reason why it did was because it was run locally and run in a way that was very practical, hands on and bottom line oriented. It was not run by a distant bureaucracy. It was not hamstringing in its ability to be creative in how it operated. It did a lot of things in conjunction with the local community and/or local businesses.

That is an example or a model of how things can operate in this kind of environment. We brought those people who were running that program in the north island to Ottawa. They appeared before the

fisheries committee at that time. We had some very good feedback. On balance that was a very good program. The program was terminated a little prematurely. During its lifetime it created some very good results for people.

I have another example of retraining or measures for older workers which was quite different. We had a large copper mine on the north island that closed in the early nineties after about 35 years of operation. The community of Port Hardy was very dependent upon that mine for employment and tax revenue.

The miners from that operation, who were in the older age category, became eligible for the tail end of a program that was run by HRDC in those days, whereby they could bridge to retirement. It was not a retraining program and not at all in tune with this. This was another example of what kind of measures can be looked at in terms of older workers.

● (1135)

Certainly, to get into an extended training program, the intent of individuals is to stay where they are which is not where employment possibilities may be. Since they are not that far away from the ability to retire, just bridging for retirement makes a lot of sense at times. In the case of this mine, some miners took advantage of that. That meant that they ended up staying in the community, retaining the assets of their home, continued to contribute to the economy with their retirement fixed income, and many of them are still there today. It would have been a great loss to the community if they had moved away.

My riding contains the wood basket for the coast. The largest part of the annual cut for the forest industry in coastal British Columbia would come from the northern part of Vancouver Island and the adjacent mainland. That has meant, as a consequence of the softwood dispute, that there has been a huge displacement and restructuring in that workforce.

It occurs to me that other than a community-based softwood adjustment package announced by the government, there has been very little done for the industry or the workers and their families in this area. One Friday afternoon announcement in Ottawa of a guarantee for a client customer of Bombardier exceeds in total the aid that has been coming forward from the federal government to the entire Canadian softwood industry, the workers, families and communities, despite the fact that the softwood dispute is our number one trade dispute.

It is the world's number one trade dispute. It has gone on for years. It now consists of trade harassment and at this point it appears that the government federal strategy is to starve our own industry into submission, so that it will be willing to surrender to some kind of a deal which is not in our national interest.

This lack of commitment to older workers, particularly in the softwood area, is a concern. We have a private member's Bill C-364 sponsored by the member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca. It talks about support for industry in disputes such as the softwood dispute in an important way. One of the clauses talk about compensation:

—on more than one occasion within any period of six years or continuously during any period of more than two years, been the subject of an unjustified restrictive trade action or actions in respect of the export of Canadian goods to a foreign state by the government of that state, the Minister shall pay all reasonable legal expenses incurred by the exporter or the association in any litigation actions enforcing the terms of a trade agreement.

Right now the Canadian forest industry is being asked to pick up the tab on most of the legal costs for what amounts to pursuing legal and trade actions that are in the national interest.

I see that I am not going to be able to complete my presentation because my time is up.

● (1140)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Madam Speaker, the motion from the Bloc says in part:

That, in the opinion of the House, due to the increasing number of factory closures associated with globalization—

Our colleague from B.C. is talking about the fishery issue. Does he think the issue of fisheries and older workers in his region has anything to do with globalization? Is it not just that there are fewer fish than there used to be? Is it not because people are buying more fish elsewhere in the world that we cannot harvest more.

In my own area, for example, globalization is not to blame if fish plants are closing in the Acadian peninsula. There is just no cod left in the sea. The same thing is happening in Newfoundland and Labrador. Globalization has nothing to do with fish plant closures.

This motion is a partial one, dealing with a small part of the issue. It does not cover all workers who lose their jobs when plants close down and job disappear because of a lack of work.

Would the hon. member care to comment?

[*English*]

Mr. John Duncan: Madam Speaker, I agree with the direction of the question. I support this motion because it is talking about establishing a strategy to help older workers who lose their jobs.

In terms of the preamble regarding globalization, that to me is neither here nor there in a sense because the root cause of job loss can be many things. Even in the three examples I gave, the closure of the mine had to do with exhausting the resource. The fisheries downsizing had to do with technology and the fact that a single boat can catch more fish than it ever could. In the softwood area, a lot of that has to do with a trade dispute. Therefore in actual fact, in those three examples there is nothing that comes to mind that would have anything to do with globalization.

I agree with the fact that the motion is a little weak in regard to the wording, but the intent is clear. We are dealing with a strategy to help older workers who lose their jobs and I am happy to support that intent.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Madam Speaker, before asking my question, I would like to add a clarification to the text, since I am the mover.

One must understand that the French text, the way it is written, talks about globalization in a general sense. I wish to reassure our

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Conservative colleagues, as well as my colleague from the NDP, who made speeches that were quite relevant to this issue. I do not know the English language very well, but it seems to me that the English translation suggests a more restrictive measure that would apply only if people were laid off because of globalization.

The reference to globalization only indicates that the closures are happening faster because of globalization. However, it is only a context, not a cause. Consequently, the measures mentioned in the motion should be taken in all cases where there are massive layoffs of older workers.

I wish to add, for my colleague from the NDP, that we are not limiting these measures only to areas where the unemployment rate is 10% or more, but to all older workers.

I have a question for the hon. member. Earlier, the subject of the recovery of the \$46 billion—soon to be \$47 billion—misappropriated from the employment insurance fund, was raised. I fully understand that, in this debate, their constant concern is the return of the \$47 billion and up to the employment insurance fund.

● (1145)

[*English*]

Mr. John Duncan: Madam Speaker, we need major reform of the EI system. We have some examples of people who are not currently covered. People who get sick receive shorter EI benefits than if they were still working and then they have no choice but to go on welfare and eat up their assets. That is wrong. Once we make those reforms, we should put EI on a sustainable basis, not one where it builds huge surpluses that then go into government general revenues that get spent inappropriately.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to join in today's debate. I will be splitting my time with my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst.

Unless I am mishearing things, it sounds like every caucus in the House is going to be supporting the motion, which is both a blessing and a curse. It is a blessing because it means that we are going to have the unanimous support of the House in dealing with older workers who, without assistance from their senior levels of government, are quite frankly being thrown on the social scrap heap.

This then becomes a motherhood issue. When every member votes that way, that is a powerful tool. My experience in these things is that by having unanimous consent there is no controversy and no tension. Everybody feels good about having taken the motherhood position and done something about older workers, and then everybody trots off and that is the end of it.

I wonder whether the vote would be the same if we actually had the strategy in front of us with the details included and the price tag attached to it. I would like to think so, but I have some real doubts, particularly when I look at the history of the Conservatives and the Liberals on these kinds of issues.

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I want to compliment my colleagues in the Bloc once again for bringing forward matters dealing with social issues and for their understanding of individual citizens in the context of our society. We in the NDP share a lot of the same values as the Bloc and the PQ., and that is why we are supportive of the motion. We obviously disagree on the huge national issues, but nonetheless we are supportive of today's motion. Bloc members are to be complimented and commended for bringing this forward and I commend them without any reluctance.

Now let me turn to the Liberals and the Conservatives, and I will start with the Conservatives first. A member from the Conservative caucus spoke earlier. It sounded to me that the reason he did not support the improvements in EI from 14 weeks to 12 weeks was because he was concerned about mischief. If I misunderstood, I hope members will use the opportunity of questions and comments to set me right.

It is one thing for members to offer up a fig leaf for the reason why they are voting a certain way, but they should at least come up with a decent one. To suggest that members are going to vote against an improvement to EI that would help literally tens of thousands of Canadians who desperately need help because they are concerned about mischief is pretty weak.

When the Conservatives talk about these kinds of issues they say the right words. But boy, I would love to see 1/100th of the passion and commitment on this issue that they put into tax cuts or into cutting the premiums to EI. We need to take a look at their track record and see what they have said about premiums and the need to cut them, and the effect of that on competitiveness and all of the corporate arguments about why EI premiums need to be cut. I would love to see just a fraction of that kind of passion going toward what we ought to be doing. We should be building an EI system that protects workers as it is meant to do. We could use that kind of commitment.

The member who made the mischievous comment also went on to say that he found \$55 million to be a rather daunting figure. That would appear to be a big number to a rookie MP. I did not hear that kind of concern when \$4.6 billion in new corporate tax cuts, that nobody asked for, were in the original Liberal budget. Nor did I hear him or his colleagues say that \$100 billion was a humungous number when the Liberal government a few years ago brought in tax cuts.

A Liberal caucus member is applauding that. I am sure his corporate friends are thrilled with the fact that he is so enamoured with \$100 billion in corporate tax cuts or the added \$4.6 billion gift the Liberals gave in their first budget. I would like to see him applauding more often when people are standing up talking about the needs of unemployed workers.

• (1150)

Today we are talking about older workers who are falling through the cracks, workers who have already given decades of their lives to this economy, to their families and to their communities. These are workers who have mortgages to pay and who are trying to struggle with paying tuition fees that have gone through the roof to send their kids to university, so maybe they will have a life where they would not face this kind of absolute disaster. I say to the members of the

Liberal caucus to show that kind of compassion and that kind of support.

The Conservatives, to finish my comments on them, have the right words to say, but I am not at all convinced that they are committed to this in their hearts. We will see as time goes on whether or not that is the case.

For the Liberals, unfortunately, I do not have three hours, which I wish I did. That is about how long it would take just to list the examples of how they continue to talk like New Democrats when there are issues affecting communities and workers, and govern like Conservatives when they make decisions and bring in budgets.

If the House wants examples, it was just a few days ago that we voted in the House to improve EI on a motion brought forward by my colleague and EI critic from Acadie—Bathurst. The Liberals opposed it. I did not hear the minister today bragging about taking that position.

CCAA brought out something that deals with some wage protection. We may deal with that as to whether or not it is a positive step, but it does not address the issue of older workers who are facing their pension plans being ripped apart because they do not have the legislative protection that the NDP is trying to get the House to give to those workers. So far, the Liberals are not there. They have not been there for 12 years and they are still not there. It is the Liberal government that allows Wal-Mart to use economic terrorism to keep unions out of those workplaces. Is this a government that cares about workers?

What about the latest move in the last year or so that wiped out hundreds, if not thousands, of community based non-profit employment service agencies? They were wiped off the face of the map and replaced with for profit companies. The Liberals say this is a good thing, but no one in any of the communities that I know says that. Certainly, in Hamilton no one says that. We have a great history of some terrific organizations that are now wiped out.

There is a lot of concern about the ties of some of these for profit companies to the Liberal Party. Is there a connection there? Time will tell. However, the track record is one of a government that talks. The Liberals talk a great story for workers and communities. They talk like New Democrats and they campaign like New Democrats, but at the end of the day, they still govern and they still budget like Conservatives.

Yes, we need to support the motion here today. We saw Lévi Strauss removed, ripped out of the Hamilton community, out of Stoney Creek, and those jobs went over to Asia and China. There were thousands of people put out of work because of the demands of Wal-Mart to provide the lowest possible cost, even if that meant to exploit workers halfway around the world, and throw workers in Canada and the United States onto the social scrap heap.

This is a huge issue and I truly hope that the vote that happens on this is not just meant to pacify the unemployed and make it look good so that the Liberals can say that they took the motherhood position. I truly hope it is the beginning of a real strategy that does come back to this place with details in order to do something for older workers and all workers for that matter. The Liberals should put a price tag on it and then let us see who is prepared to stand up for workers and who is not.

• (1155)

Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to the presentation by my colleague from the NDP. My first point is that I would not confuse interest or passion in an issue with heightened rhetoric and shrill commentary in the House. Many people feel strongly about this, they express those views and opinions calmly and articulate their views in a responsible way in addressing the problem.

I feel strongly about this. I have spent many hours and days, particularly over the past few months, in committee considering and deliberating these changes. As I said, I come from a rural riding with a relatively high unemployment rate. I come from a rural riding with a high seniors rate. This is relevant to me. That is one of the reasons why I support this motion.

My second point is that the member suggests it is a bad thing if the parties oppose the motion, but it is also a bad thing if the parties support it. In terms of support or opposition to the motion, what does he want? He apparently does not want us to support it. I presume that if we were planning to oppose it, he would not want that either.

Specifically, with regard to the motion before us and the vote we have in the coming days, what does he want all the other parties to do?

Mr. David Christopherson: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member listening and taking the time to comment. I do not think it is that hard to figure out. I was hoping everybody would vote for the motion, but I was also pointing out that I do not want that to become the only thing the Conservatives are prepared to do, which is to vote for a motherhood motion.

I did not write down exactly what the member said, but it had something to do with rhetoric and shrill comments and that is fair comment. My speaking style lends itself to that kind of criticism and I accept that.

The member asks what I want. What I want is for the Conservatives not to vote for what is now simply a motherhood position, and should be a motherhood position, and that is to help older workers.

We had a motion in the House last week to improve the system so people could go from 14 weeks to the best 12 weeks. Does the member want to know what I want? I want to see more than 7 out of 99 Conservatives stand and put their precious votes on the line to do something that helps older workers and workers in general rather than just vote for a motherhood position.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Madam Speaker, first I want to thank and congratulate my NDP friend for the quality of his speech and for his determination. It was indeed a passionate

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speech, but not too passionate. As a matter of fact, it is even more moderate than the aggression against workers and it is therefore to his credit.

His comments about the Liberal Party are so true. If the Liberals were driving on the road, they would be very dangerous for the other drivers, putting on their left signal, but turning to the right. This can cause accidents and damages, particularly to workers in this case.

The minister talked earlier about training for workers. Everybody agrees with that, even the NDP. However, I would have liked to hear the minister talk about income support measures. She did not say anything about that. I would like the member to tell us if he has thought about it, and if so, what he thinks of her silence. I would like to understand a little better the concern he was expressing a little earlier.

• (1200)

[English]

Mr. David Christopherson: Madam Speaker, I was rather underwhelmed by the speech from the minister. I realize she is new but I did not hear about commitment. The only thing that really mattered was that the government would vote for it, and that is good. It guarantees this will pass.

There is something I would like to see. We keep dealing with these economic issues. The train wreck is coming. We know the trains are on the same track. We know that globalization, free trade, corporate downsizing, all these things, cause massive layoffs.

The federal Liberals seem to spend more time ensuring that enough ambulances are there to take people to the hospital rather than getting in behind the scene and stopping the crash in the first place. That takes us into their trade, economic and budget policies and a whole host of other issues. In addition to dealing with people who are affected by this, we ought to be doing everything we can as a nation to bloody well prevent it from happening in the first place.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas for introducing this motion before the House of Commons.

I must say, first of all, that it is too bad because the hon. member had a chance and opportunity to introduce a motion asking for specific measures. Such a motion might have read as follows: "That, in the opinion of the House, the Liberal government should establish a retirement program for people of a certain age who have lost their jobs". He could have introduced something specific.

But this motion is quite vague—so vague in fact that the Liberals will be able to adopt it. He could have introduced the following motion: "That, in the opinion of the House, due to the increasing number of factory closures, the government should establish a strategy—"

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It was not necessary to mention the context of globalization. The fish in Chaleur Bay are not affected by globalization. That is not why there are no more cod and why fishers have lost their jobs. There are nuances here and questions of interpretation already.

I am just saying it is too bad that this was not more direct. As my friend commented last week when he said that the NDP motion was a piecemeal motion, consisting of little bits, I would like to return the compliment and tell him that this motion is piecemeal; these are little bits.

It seems that the government has stood up. It is going to support this motion because it already has a strategy and pilot projects that are underway. It is already doing that. It just boasted that it was doing all the right things. In reality, it is not doing the right things, when you get down to it. That is what I am getting at, at the reality out there.

With all due respect, it is true that we can stand up in Canada and say the economy is doing well in some regions. It is true that the economy is doing well in Alberta, where they were looking for people to come and work. There is a shortage of workers. In other regions, the economy is doing well in manufacturing. Things are very good in certain regions, but in others, things are not so good.

I want to talk about the Acadian peninsula region, where three fish processing plants have closed since 2003. Hundreds of people have been laid off. The average age of these workers is 45 and up. If that is the average age, how many are 50 or 55 years old or more?

The strategy of the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development is to providing training and education. Some of these people have worked in fish plants for over 35 years. They have a grade 10 or 11 education. They wonder what they are to do, at age 55. Are they supposed to finish grade 12 and then go to university? That makes no sense.

This is where an income support program would help. It would keep people in the riding. The Conservative member said earlier that the program in his region had allowed people to stay there, just like the POWA and the PWAP, which helped loggers and plant workers in 1992. Those people had the opportunity to stay in the region.

These programs no longer exist. The only program we have is social assistance, which means poverty and hardship. This is disgraceful for a country that claims to have a really strong economy.

The government forgets what is happening out there. We cannot simply look at statistics and the situation in major cities or in prosperous regions. We have to look elsewhere and see the impact caused by disasters, such as losing the Atlantic fishery. We need only look at what happened in Newfoundland and Labrador. These people need assistance programs.

Earlier, the Conservatives were saying that they had problems with the changes to EI. Of course. The Subcommittee on the Employment Insurance Funds of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities considered a bill and wanted to make recommendations.

I remember that the member for Portage—Lisgar said that EI premiums should be lowered. He had six employees and it was too expensive for him. That way, he would save money.

● (1205)

I would say he had a conflict of interest as a member of the House of Commons. He wanted us to pass a bill that would have reduced premium rates, because his company was paying out too much money. He should abstain from voting on employment insurance issues. He supports only those measures that are favourable to employers, such as the lowering of premiums.

In addition to EI, we need programs for workers. I support training programs. We must remember, however, that the program they are asking today to have established, although we do not have all the details, could cost \$55 million. In Acadie—Bathurst alone, \$81 million in EI benefits are lost each year, whereas the figure is \$275 million annually for New Brunswick. We are talking here of a national program, which would cost \$55 million. How many families would be happy with it? Some say that \$55 million is a lot of money. In my opinion, it is only a drop in Chaleur Bay, compared with the money the Liberals have spent recently. They spend in chunks of \$100 million, without any problem. We have to pay for the Gomery commission, which will cost nearly as much. They have no problem, though, spending money on scandals.

However, the shoe is on the other foot when it comes time to help workers forced into poverty after losing their jobs without wanting to, when they are no longer of an age to attend community college or university. The motion concerns these people. There is no question here of giving training to a 30 year old man working in a factory where new technology has been introduced, in order for him to keep his job.

There are different things to be noted about employment. There is an EI program already, called phase II, under which companies can let the government know they have acquired new technology and request funding in order to train their employees. Thus, they get funding.

Let us take an example that occurred not so long ago in my riding in New Brunswick. At the Brunswick mine, Noranda asked the government for funds to provide training to miners and tradespeople so they could continue to do their work. It received \$2 million to provide training, which helped these workers keep their jobs.

Let us go back to the motion. It does not deal with that; it deals with people who have lost their job and who are in a dead end. They are at an age where they can still earn a living; they want income support. This is not a strategy dealing with all aspects of employment. There are already different kinds of strategies. The motion itself deals with people who no longer have a job and who will not find another one. Even if they take the train or the plane out to Alberta, they would not be hired. These 1,000 men and women who work in fish processing plants in Caraquet, Shippagan, Lamèque, Maisonnnette, Anse-Bleue, Bas-Caraquet, even if we were to send them, with all due respect, to Calgary, Esso would not hire them on work sites.

We are talking about these people who lost their job and who do not want to become welfare recipients. They want to live with some pride and dignity. They do not want to have to say that, as a reward for having given 35 years of their life to their employer, they now rely on welfare and are among the poorest on the planet.

This is what the motion is about: putting in place programs that are similar to those that existed in 1988 and in 1992, programs to help people when they lose their job.

This is not only associated with globalization; it is related to the realities in the regions. We must help not only workers, but the regions themselves. If we lose these workers, it is the regions themselves that suffer, small businesses as well as all the other people.

• (1210)

Nevertheless, we will support the motion, because it is going in the right direction. As I said, it does not go far enough, it only proposes bits and pieces, but we will support it. It will help older workers who are in need. With \$46 billion in EI surplus, the government has the responsibility to do so.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, because of the member's experience in dealing with issues of displaced workers and EI, I have a question for him.

When we are talking about older workers in my region, whether they be miners, forestry workers, people working the land or people living in isolated communities, when they lose their jobs it is not only them who are displaced, it is the entire community. To add to that, many of these people have already suffered physical damage through the type of work they have done and are unable to be retrained. They are facing medical costs. If they are 48 or 49 years old and have worked 20 some years in the mines, their backs are gone.

When these people lose their jobs their entire community is affected. We are talking here about single industry communities. We have to add to the fact that while they have lost their income, they have also lost equity in their homes. Who will buy a home in a community where the mill has shut down?

We also see this in the loss of services. We cannot get doctors and nurses into communities where the income sources are dying. The young people will not return.

I also would like the member to comment on what is happening in northern Ontario now where the provincial Liberal government is committed to allowing the giant forestry companies to move the wood to wherever they please. They are creating super mills. The provincial government is allowing the large forestry companies that control the entire wood supply in Quebec and Ontario to move the wood where they want. They are then separating our resources from our communities.

Communities in my region, such as Opatatika, Val Rita, Kapuskasing, Hearst, Iroquois Falls and Smooth Rock Falls, are dependent on these resources. We are now being told by the provincial Liberals, which I believe is also part of a larger strategy at

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the federal level, that resources do not belong to communities nor to people any more, that they belong to the corporations.

With his experience, could the member tell us how we address the issue of workers who have lost their jobs in single industry communities when there are no alternatives and they are aging?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, we have the same problem in New Brunswick. The pulp and paper company in New Brunswick allowed a front line company to come in and it is running the place. The community has nothing to say on it any more. Right now they are on strike.

The government not only allowed the wood to go out of the community but it allowed it to go out of New Brunswick because it supports big corporations and corporations can do anything they want.

It was a shame when the mill in Nackawic went into bankruptcy and the workers lost their pension plan. What did the government do to help them? It has done sweet nothing so far. This is a shame.

What the motion would do is create a program to help those people who are aging. It is the same with Brunswick Mines when it closes five years from now. We will have people 50 years old and unemployed.

I was an underground worker and I am sure if I had continued to work there until I was 50 years old and then lost my job, I would not have been able to find another job. I would have been searching but I probably would never have found a job. Most of the jobs available today are in the high tech industry and using computers. Our youth today learn computers at the age of two, but not the workers who come out of a mine, such as the ones in Timmins or in New Brunswick.

When the Minister of Natural Resources visited my region he told the woodcutters to take their power saws and hang them on the wall because it was over, that the company no longer wanted power saws in the bush. They told New Brunswickers how they should work. They put people out of their jobs and put them on welfare. This is not taking responsibility for the community.

The only way to take responsibility for the community is to look after the community and to talk with the people and find solutions. It is not just by running away with the company and saying that if it does something to the big company it will close its door. Well, let it close the door and go home because we do not need it.

We need a company that accepts responsibility. We could do it through people and through co-ops where we could look at ways to keep our resources and create jobs instead of taking the job, sending it somewhere else and not taking responsibility.

I say shame on the Liberal government of Ontario if it does not look after the workers. When an election comes, oh boy, it certainly wants the votes of these working men and women.

• (1215)

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Boire (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

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I am pleased that the Bloc has brought in this motion today on the program for older workers. The textile and clothing industries are seriously affected. The situation is alarming and the numerous closures will keep on happening. The Bloc Québécois is delighted to have the support of the present minister for this motion.

As we know, the government has been slow to act and has not provided enough assistance, particularly for the workers who lost their factory jobs in the Huntingdon area.

More than 800 jobs were lost and the measures announced will not be sufficient to replace them. I have great difficulty in understanding the Minister of Finance's statement that the Bloc Québécois was impatient to get this settled, when it was an urgent matter.

These factories were the source of income for couples, for entire families, from one generation to another, and were a true economic force for all the surrounding municipalities. Seventy-five per cent of the working population of Huntingdon and the surrounding area was employed there.

The region is undergoing a serious crisis because of the announced textile mill closures. The workers have sounded an alarm and are calling for an immediate emergency plan. More than 43% of the workers affected have not finished high school and are over the age of 50. You will therefore understand that it is not very likely they will be returning to work. Whole towns and villages are at risk of disappearing. These factories are their only hope.

Many such factories have closed and many more will in the weeks and months to come. My riding of Beauharnois—Salaberry and several others in Quebec have been hard hit.

On December 13, 2004, two factories closed down in Huntingdon, throwing 800 people out of work. That was 40% of the manufacturing sector jobs in the region. Today, they are all closed. In Huntingdon, 30% of the population is below the poverty line, and 70% of the working population used to be employed in the factories that have closed down. These two factories paid out \$25 million in wages annually and contributed \$600,000 to the municipality in taxes.

At the moment, psychological and economic distress hangs over the entire region: Huntingdon, Ormstown, Valleyfield and the RCMs of Haut-Saint-Laurent Beauharnois. The whole area is affected. In both cases, the workers who were laid off are having difficulty finding a job. Nearly half of them did not complete their final year of high school.

On December 9, 2004, I tabled in this House a petition signed by 2,845 workers from the region of Huntingdon, which was intended to make the federal government aware of the increasingly obvious problems in the textile industry. No help was provided in response to this cry of alarm by the workers of my riding.

On December 14, 2004, following pressure from the Bloc Québécois, the government hastily announced three measures to help the industry.

We asked a number of questions in this House, and the minister—the former minister—even added insult to injury by saying that older

workers did not want passive measures. That is an indication of the extent of this government's irony and disdain.

On February 8, 2005, we presented a motion in this House to establish a POWA, among other things. Most of the members supported it. Unfortunately, the government put paid to the will of the members and did nothing.

Contrary to what the former minister said, the workers in my riding want active measures, but the older ones want passive measures, such as a program of assistance for older workers. They feel the government has abandoned them.

On March 24, I tabled another petition with over 5,300 names calling for the return of POWA. The government's reaction was the same: nothing.

In my riding, the work of local stakeholders will probably make it possible to reclassify many of the workers in various business that will be set up in the region later on. One serious problem remains, however, with the so-called older workers. There is a consensus in the region that older workers need a government program to bridge between EI and retirement.

The Bloc Québécois is concerned at the moment about this and has had discussions with local stakeholders to resolve it. On behalf of the workers whose factory doors have closed, I call on the federal government to act, as I have done since the start of this session of the House, to help the older workers in my riding.

• (1220)

The worst thing about this is that the federal government has known for a long time what was brewing and did nothing. The Bloc Québécois has been talking for months about the serious danger of massive job losses in the textile industry and had been demanding transition measures. But Ottawa has always turned a blind eye.

The first POWA started in 1983 to help the workers at Dominion Textile, which had a plant in Valleyfield in my riding. The federal government slaughtered the employment insurance system and ended the second POWA in March 1997. And now it is accumulating huge budget surpluses of \$9.1 billion on the backs of workers in the provinces.

In the textile industries in the Huntingdon area, about 170 jobs out of the 800 would be eligible for a possible older workers assistance program, or about 21% of the laid off workers. It will be essential to provide assistance for textile workers who lose their jobs because there will inevitably be companies that close their doors. The workers in this sector are often older and do not have much education, and many of them will not be able to find other jobs. The laid off workers need a program like POWA more than ever to enable older people to bridge the gap between employment insurance and retirement. The future of an entire region depends on it.

If the government does not want to assume this task, it should transfer the money to Quebec City so that Quebec, like the provinces, can meet the needs of older workers.

The Bloc Québécois believes that Ottawa should provide the maximum amount allowed under the Employment Insurance Act for training and give Quebec its share. The Government of Quebec's annual shortfall is more than \$200 million. The current situation in the textile and apparel sector is a perfect example of the need for a program to assist older workers and pay benefits to those who could possibly lose their jobs in companies that are affected by this situation.

The solution is very simple: institute an older workers assistance program that would bridge the gap between employment insurance and retirement. The Bloc Québécois estimates that the cost of establishing a POWA in the textile sector all across Canada would be \$50 million.

Older workers currently receiving employment insurance benefits are desperate. After the benefits run out, what awaits these older textile workers? Social assistance maybe? Some of these workers have come to see me, very discouraged, and even talking about suicide. Others wondered how they would survive after their benefits run out.

The slaughter is continuing, and the government must be sensitive to the cries of despair coming from these workers. It is important and essential therefore that the government come to the assistance of older textile workers by establishing an older workers assistance program.

• (1225)

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague for his speech and for all the work he has been doing on this issue, which we generally associate with the city of Huntingdon. The hon. member did indicate, however, that the situation is far from being limited to that city.

As the Bloc critic for human resources and skills development, I recently had the opportunity to meet with more than 130 workers. My colleague and I inquired about the situation. At this time, the priority is to ensure income when the regular EI benefits period is over.

Here is my question for my colleague. Could he describe for the House the income situation of people from his riding who have been laid off? In fact, they were not all laid off at the same time. Some have been without job for one year while others lost their job just recently. I would like him to give us a portrait of those workers' situation.

Mr. Alain Boire: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas for his question.

Indeed, the situation in the Haut-Saint-Laurent RCM, which includes Huntingdon, Ormstown and surrounding areas, is critical. The last plant shut down on May 27. The workers who were first laid off have now used up their employment insurance benefits. These people now find themselves with nothing, with no income.

Last weekend, I met people who told me that they had sold their house. Many houses are up for sale. These older workers have nothing left, they have no income, no savings. They find themselves in a very critical situation.

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Tensions run fairly high in that region. We sense a feeling of despair regarding the help that the government can bring to these people. They feel forgotten and ridiculed. Generation after generation, these people gave their lives working for these plants. They paid municipal taxes and they paid income tax. But, right now, they are being abandoned, they are left to fend for themselves.

Let us not forget that this is an agricultural region, not far from the Jardins du Québec. This means there are not many businesses hiring people, with the result that these workers cannot retrain in other fields.

After I tabled petitions in the House, the former minister replied that HRSDC was providing active programs. However, we cannot ask a 55 year old person who, as is the case for 43% of the population in that region, has not completed a high school education, to go back to school. The education level is very low to start with.

We cannot ask them to start a business either. These people are manual workers, which means they need some outside help, as soon as their employment insurance benefits run out, to meet their needs until they reach retirement.

POWA would be an ideal solution for them, since the region has already experienced a similar situation. Indeed, Dominion Textile, in Valleyfield, shut down a number of years ago and such a program was put in place. This is why POWA is critical for that region.

• (1230)

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I think today marks an important milestone in an issue the Bloc Québécois has been working intensively on for several years, trying to get the federal government to agree to re-create a program for older worker assistance, and not merely a retraining program to enable people to find other jobs.

Today, there has been recognition by the minister of the Bloc Québécois's proposal, which must also include a component called "income support". There are measures called passive measures which, basically, are very active, because their aim is to ensure that a person who is 57 or 58 years old, who no longer has a job, who tries to find another job, but is not successful, can receive income support that enables him or her to make it to the period of time when they will be able to receive adequate benefits from the Quebec pension plan or old age security.

A lot of questions related to this issue have been asked over the years during oral question period. Bills have been introduced. But for several years, our efforts have been blocked by the government's position. Today, we learn from the minister that the government will vote in favour of our motion. I hope this example will be followed up on as soon as possible to ensure that there be a real and concrete program which will allow these workers to have a decent income when they no longer have a job, when they prepare for retirement and when they are unable to find employment.

I find this more important now than exactly a year ago when we were in the middle of an election campaign. In my riding, unfortunately, there was the announcement that the Whirlpool plant, which employed 500 people, would close. Out of these 500 people, 100 or so were older and met the criteria of the Program for Older Worker Adjustment.

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I met with these people in the days following the election. They were the first group to ask for a meeting in my office. I remember a few workers explaining their own situation to me. I met with them again over the past year and they had taken steps to find work, which was not exactly easy.

Today, in the context of globalization, there is a real flurry of competition. The clothing, textile, furniture and other sectors are deeply affected by the competition from China, India, Bangladesh and other emerging markets.

Globalization has brought about significant gains in productivity. There is more to it than just the negative. There are very positive aspects to globalization that help us capture market shares. There is the gain in productivity that we are making as a society. However, for now, the people who are being penalized by the negative side of globalization, or by the job losses in the less competitive sectors, have not benefited from this gain in productivity whatsoever. I hope they will.

I gave the example of the people from Whirlpool. People who worked for 25 or 30 years, who contributed to the EI plan the whole time, who were employed 365 days a year and were told at the end of the day, "After your severance package, there will be 45 weeks of EI and that is it", truly feel like they have been had since the contributions they paid during 25 or 30 years of work provided other people with a satisfactory income. And they do not get to benefit from it in any acceptable way.

I think our motion deserves to be supported and it seems like it will be by all the members of this House. We hope a program will be implemented as soon as possible.

There is another example in my riding—Industries Troie, in Saint-Pamphile. There were 180 women working in this modern and very well managed textile industry. Unfortunately, with the new global competition, these women found themselves without a job overnight. Since that time, we are trying to give them a chance and they are trying themselves to find another job.

When one earns \$8, \$9 or \$10 an hour, in our own municipality, it is acceptable in terms of the situation and the value of income. However, if we say to these people that, for the same wages, they will have to go and work 50 or 75 kilometres from their home, there is a problem, because their family is already settled in that area. Consequently, on the economic level, it is totally unacceptable.

Can you imagine what it would mean for older women who cannot find this type of work? It would be important, particularly for low income people, to have access to the supplement that we hope will be implemented through the Program for Older Worker Adjustment.

This program should be applied to all people 55 and over. It should also be flexible. Indeed, someone who takes part in it at 58 or 59 years old should be able to receive an amount that takes into account the fact that the period for receiving other sources of income is shorter.

• (1235)

It should also be flexible enough that a 58 or 59 year old worker who signs up for the program could receive an amount that would

take into account the fact that there is a shorter time before he or she has access to other income sources. Furthermore, if one signs up earlier, one could profit from income that would be spaced over a number of years, in order to ensure that the negative impact on the family income would be lower. We must absolutely move forward with this.

For that matter, a pilot project was submitted by Quebec labour federations, that is the CSD, the CSN, the SCSQ and the FTQ. It is a joint project and has been submitted to the government. I am sure that the labour federations as well as their members, the workers, will be happy to hear that today, finally, with the help of the Bloc's motion now before the House, the government says it favours the creation of such a program.

I invite the government to draw inspiration from the program proposed by the labour federations because it is a reasonable program which does not contain extravagant demands. We expect that this program will cost approximately \$55 million the first year, and \$75 million in following years.

Of course, \$55 million is a lot of money. However, if one takes into account the total revenue of the federal government, \$55 million is not that much.

We are told that the economy is moving along fairly strongly, that employment is generally doing well and that the interest rates remain low. All this is no doubt due to globalization, the opening of markets. However, those who were negatively impacted, who are in the weakest sectors and now live off the textile industries are in tough situations. This is all due to the entry into the Canadian market of products from China and other emerging nations, further to the abolition of tariffs on December 31.

We therefore have to try and give companies every opportunity. We are trying to give workers every opportunity to retrain when they lose their job. However, we should have the decency to help those who cannot find another job and give them some benefits. It is not a handout. We must simply recognize that in our society we have made choices to improve the overall quality of life of Canadians.

Nevertheless, people will be left behind if we do not come up with a program like the Program for Older Worker Adjustment. This requires a special effort. Let us not forget those who work in factories now and who are 50, 52 or 55 years old. Very often they have been working there for 25 or 30 years.

When they began working in the plants, they did not necessarily have the level of education now required for the jobs they do. However, they certainly acquired expertise that cannot easily be transferred to other employers. During all the years those people worked, the government was happy to let them pay income tax and premiums and contribute to our collective wealth. Now, it should be their turn to receive from the government. That would only be fair. That is the thrust of the motion we moved.

This is what it says:

That, in the opinion of the House, due to the increasing number of factory closures associated with globalization, the government should establish a strategy to help older workers who lose their jobs, a strategy that should include income support measures.

Other types of businesses are not excluded. We say that the present trend is towards globalization. All traditional industries are affected by that new reality. We saw it with lumber, where the crisis had profound impacts. That resulted from globalization and foreign markets expansion.

In our motion, there is an additional element that the government has never recognized until now.

I will conclude with that. Besides the retraining and job search support measures implied by our motion which, I hope will receive unanimous support in the House, the federal government would also put in place a program to help the workers who cannot find a new job before reaching retirement age in spite of all their efforts. I hope that this motion constitutes the last step before the implementation of a program bringing satisfaction and justice to older workers.

• (1240)

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on his remarks. I should mention that my colleague from the Bloc who just spoke was our party critic for human resources and skills development before I took over. He did an outstanding job which laid the foundation of our positions. Of the 32 suggestions the standing committee on human resources made last fall, 28 dealt with improvements in the EI program.

One of these recommendations was that POWA should be reinstated. Since my colleague has both some experience and knowledge of this issue, I would like him to tell me how the experience of POWA went, especially in the latter stages. In the light of practical experience, how could we implement this program we want to reinstate?

Second, it is worth mentioning that this program is not costly, compared to the amount of money available to fund it.

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas who, because of his tenacity on all EI issues, is influencing the House to move to different positions. Of course, on certain points, we still have not succeeded in getting any action from the government. But in the end, I am sure that, with logical arguments, we will succeed for the greater good of workers.

We should recall that the assistance program that applied until 1995 helped people get the kind of support we are demanding and hoping for in this program. It was scrapped because they said at that time that it could be too expensive. The government was slashing expenditures right and left. In that context, it scrapped this program.

We must also remember that, at that time, we were not experiencing all the effects of globalization that we are now. Now, our financial situation is much more advantageous overall. However, there are also people who are having a hard time. The program continues to exist in the form of pilot projects for retraining. These projects have continued to operate over the past few years. Some workers have managed to find other jobs. However, what was and is still missing is the part that will help people who are unable to find employment on their own.

As I answer this question, I am thinking of the Whirlpool employees in Montmagny, whom I met. They are in this situation and, today, since the Bloc Québécois motion will pass unanimously, they may see a little light at the end of the tunnel. This will give them

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the chance to receive a decent income until they are eligible for the old age pension.

This situation deserves much faster action. Given that the minister has indicated she will support our motion today, we hope that a practical program will be created, based on the recommendations made by the central labour bodies in Quebec, among others, since this program is not very costly. We are talking about \$55 million for the first year and \$75 million after that.

Personally, I suspect that, had the federal government set aside sufficient funds from the EI surpluses over the past ten years instead of using \$46 billion for other purposes, this program would have been implemented a long time ago, since the government would have had the money in its reserve fund to be able to do this.

This is a shocking example of how the government circumvented the law by misappropriating the surpluses in the EI fund. Not only did this mean that premiums were too high, but it also delayed the implementation of such a program for many years.

Thus, we hope today that the government will translate its commitment into action as soon as possible so that we will have succeeded in improving EI in this respect at least, and so it will take effect as soon as possible.

• (1245)

[*English*]

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak in the House today to the motion. Let me say at the outset that I, like the minister, will be supporting the motion. The issue of older workers is important to society.

However I find the motion rather specific. I would have preferred that the motion dealt with broader classes of workers. I am talking about perhaps even younger workers, disabled workers, workers from visible minorities, female workers and workers from our aboriginal communities.

I also find that the motion is somewhat restricted when it talks about the effects of globalization. As we heard from many of the speakers here today, for a lot of the displaced workers that we see in our own ridings, towns and communities, it is not all from globalization. Part of what is happening in the Atlantic coast fishery is due to globalization but a lot of it is, in certain instances, a lack of fish.

Other trends are out there. The whole technological movement is changing a lot of the way goods are manufactured in this country and that, unfortunately, is displacing workers but, fortunately, in other cases it is employing workers.

We also have this whole dichotomy of shifts from the rural parts of Canada to the urban parts of Canada, which are presenting very specific, unique challenges to those of us in public policy. I therefore would have preferred if the motion had been a little broader but I certainly will be supporting the motion.

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I again say that this is an extremely important issue for Canadians and for governments of all levels. It is an issue dealing with the skills, the education levels, the training and the mobility of our workforce. As we look forward in society, there is probably no issue more important to the Canadian economy right now than the skill set of our workers, not only now but in the future.

We are dealing with a society where change is the only constant. Things are changing dramatically. There was a time, going back to our parents and grandparents, that when people left high school, a trade school or whatever school they went to work. It was very common that once they found a job, they kept the same job for 35 or 40 years and then retired.

That situation is no longer the case. I believe present statistics indicate clearly that young people entering the workforce right now can expect to change jobs on seven occasions before they retire. In some of these instances, the changes will be quite dramatic. They will be totally different occupations, different fields and even different professions than when the worker entered the workforce.

There has been a dramatic, fundamental structural change in the Canadian workforce, some of it good, some of it not so good, but I do not think we here in the House of Commons or in any of the provincial legislatures should delude ourselves that we can somehow stand and stop the tide from coming in or going out. These are changes that are going on in society and we need to be there to protect certain classes of workers who are caught in these changes, which is why I will be supporting the motion.

• (1250)

It is timely that this debate take place today. Yesterday General Motors announced it was restructuring. It is in the process of eliminating 25,000 workers from its various plants in North America. We do not know exactly yet where these plants will be. We are hopeful that most of them will not be in Canada, although that has not been decided yet. This is an example of some of the dramatic changes that the North American public has seen in the workplace.

Previous speakers gave personal experience accounts from the their own constituencies. The community of Huntingdon has seen a dramatic shift, whether it is in technology or globalization, and some of the textile plants have closed.

Is there a role for government? My answer is definitely, yes. There has to be a role for government. The government does need a strategy for workers who are displaced, whether it is globalization, technology or workplace changes. Regardless of what it is, the government needs to have a strategy. The point I will make is that the strategy cannot be a narrow strategy directed at one particular class of worker, whether it be a worker over 55 or over 50. It has to be broad, comprehensive and part of a continuum and there definitely has to be a role for government.

One could argue very strenuously, and I could go on for a couple hours on this, that the government presently has a fairly well thought out, well developed strategy with respect to these situations, but it is not perfect. I agree with some of the previous speakers that improvements can and should be made, and hopefully will be made, because this is a very important issue.

Going forward, we need all the workers. We need everyone's shoulder at the wheel. We are dealing with a demographic time bomb in the country. The demographers have told us clearly that our present workforce will be decreased. I believe the year 2011 is the point in time that any increases in the Canadian workforce will have to come from immigration. If there is no immigration, it means the workforce will decrease because of a shortage of workers.

The strategy we are talking about has to deal with older workers, aboriginal and disabled workers and with immigration. We talk about a future shortage of workers. When we talk to business leaders, they tell us that there is an acute shortage in some of the construction trades, with our health care workers and other trades. This has to be part of an overall, comprehensive, workforce strategy. The government has to be at the forefront with the provinces, the sectoral councils and with organized labour.

I agree that the older worker who gets caught up in these situations has a unique set of challenges. In many instances they do not have the education levels required to make a move. In many instances the skill set they have acquired over 25, 30 or 35 years is not easily transferable to another job. In many instances they do not have the mobility, like a younger worker, to pull up stakes and go to another community, another province, another part of Canada and in some cases another part of the world.

• (1255)

In many instances an employer, which in a lot of cases is wrong, is not willing to invest in the older worker going forward. That leads to the question, what is an older worker? It is very difficult to put an exact age on an older worker. Some people say 50, some say 55 and some say 60. In that cohort of workers, there is no question they experience a unique set of challenges as do other cohorts of workers.

Should we have a strategy? Yes. Should it involve older workers? Most definitely. Should it involve other cohorts of workers? Yes. Should it be comprehensive? Yes.

The government has a fairly comprehensive strategy to deal with this issue. It is not perfect and I believe improvements can be made to it. A lot of good suggestions have been made by those who spoke before me in the House today.

The first plank in the strategy is the older worker pilot projects initiative. That program was implemented to replace the previous program. It deals specifically with older workers, with respect to certain plants, areas and communities, on a project specific basis.

Circumstances are unique. I will use a plant closure in this discussion as an example. If a plant closure occurs in an area where there is extremely low unemployment and if it involves an industry where the skills are easily transferrable to the plant down the road, then the problem is not as acute as it would be if the plant were in a rural area and the skills were not transferrable to other plants or worse still, if there were just no jobs for workers available for them.

That program has been very successful. Last month the minister extended it for an additional year. The federal government works closely with the provinces with the exception of two. Evaluations are presently ongoing. Hopefully, based upon discussions, it will form part of the minister's strategy for going forward.

Another plank in this whole strategy is the skills training program, which is available to workers of any age. I have had a lot of experience dealing with constituents in this program. I believe it to be a tremendous program. It allows a worker to make a transition from one occupation to another or in some instances, from no occupation to an occupation. This is all part of the employment insurance program. It involves counselling, job search support, training and wage subsidies. It also provides support to those individuals who want to start their own business. It is a highly successful program. I assume the minister and the government will continue this program because it is needed in today's fast changing workplace.

Another issue that has to be part of the continuum is the rate of literacy and numeracy in Canada. It is unsatisfactory and still too low. This issue has to be addressed by governments at all levels. An illiterate person in today's workforce would find it extremely difficult, and some would argue impossible, to make any kind of transition to a workplace that requires any set of skills.

Another issue that has to be part of the overall strategy, dealing with older workers or people who are displaced, is the economic performance of our country.

• (1300)

I believe our unemployment rate is down approximately 6.5% or 6.6%. The unemployment rate for workers over 55 years of age is 5.9%. If the government lost control of the fiscal monetary levers at its disposal, the employment rate would rise to 11% or 12%. There is no question that the unemployment rate of workers over 55 years of age would rise at the same time and there would be more displaced and unemployed older workers.

Over the last eight years the government has done a tremendous job in managing the economic affairs of the country, and I think everyone in the House would agree with me. The unemployment rate is 6%. If that degree of economic management is allowed to continue, I would expect unemployment would remain at lower levels, which then would affect senior workers also.

The speakers for the New Democratic Party raised an interesting point earlier, with which I agree, and it is part of the continuum. That is with respect to pension legislation and it is part of this problem.

We have had situations in the last number of years in our country which are totally unacceptable. Workers have paid into a pension plan for 20, 25, 35, 40 years and part of that pension is not available to them when they retire. There is presently a situation in Nackawic, New Brunswick. Situations have been reported in the financial papers that a lot of the pension plans with the major companies are underfunded.

Clearly it is not a federal jurisdiction, so there are some jurisdictional issues. However, I believe the federal government and all provincial governments have to deal with this issue. It is totally and absolutely unacceptable in today's day and age for a worker to have paid into a recognized pension plan over the years and for some reason, through no fault of that worker, the money is not available for his or her retirement.

Another plank in the strategy is the Canada pension plan. Through the excellent work of the Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister is

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on very sound financial footing now. That is part of the retirement package for older workers. The pension can be taken when people turn 60.

An interesting point that meshes into this discussion is mandatory retirement age. That perhaps involves the provincial legislatures more than federal legislatures, but this issue is coming to the forefront of Canadian public policy. That is the point I am making. As we move forward as a society and face the worker shortage, we need older workers, just as we need disabled workers and workers from our aboriginal communities.

I want to conclude by stating again that I support the motion. To a certain extent, I wish the motion was a little broader. However, it is an important issue. I listened carefully to the speech of the minister this morning. She obviously has a good handle on the situation. I, and I believe most other Canadians, have confidence in her. I look forward to participating in the rest of the debate today.

• (1305)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the government colleague who has just spoken about the motion introduced by the Bloc Québécois on this, an opposition day.

The hon. member said that his government had a well thought out strategy and that he could talk about it for a long time. Indeed, I would like him to talk about it, maybe not for as long as he would like, but to flesh out his discourse regarding this strategy he wanted to tell us about.

He also said that our motion should not be limited to only one category of workers. It would be interesting to hear him on this issue as well. Is he referring to all categories or is it limited to certain categories and, if so, which ones?

[*English*]

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, the government does have a strategy. Whether it is well thought out, that is for others to decide.

However, to answer the member's question, I find the resolution or motion somewhat restrictive. Yes, I support it because it deals with older workers. Older workers have unique challenges when they are displaced. Sometimes it is educational, sometimes it is the skills not being transferrable, sometimes it is the mobility issue, and sometimes the companies and employers are not willing to make the investment in those older workers.

There are a number of initiatives there not only available to older workers but to all workers. However, if I make one point, I want to make the point that as we move forward in a society where labour shortages are developing, we cannot leave older workers behind who want to work. I am about talking older workers who are 53 years old and want to remain in the workforce. We cannot leave those persons behind, we cannot leave the disabled workers behind, we cannot leave the workers from the aboriginal community behind, and we cannot leave any class or cohort of workers behind as we move forward as a society.

Supply

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the member who has just finished his statement. Obviously, he said that he was supporting the Bloc Québécois motion. I would like to know whether the strategy to help older workers would provide income support for those older workers who lose their jobs? In other words, will those workers have access to income support measures when they cease to receive regular employment insurance benefits, namely after the 50 weeks set by the commission.

[*English*]

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, yes, there must be a comprehensive strategy worked out for displaced workers.

If the hon. member's question is, and I am not sure it is, if a worker who is over 50 years of age gets laid off from any job anywhere in Canada is he or she entitled to a pension until the age of 65? The answer is no. I will not support that. Do I support a strategy? Yes.

We have a number of prongs in an existing strategy which can be improved and enhanced. We have the older workers pilot project initiative from which the members from Quebec have benefited. There have been 74 projects and some \$24 million in the last five or six years. We have the EI program itself, which again is one prong. It is helpful. It does provide the first 45 weeks of benefits. It is not the total answer. We also have the skills training program.

To answer the hon. member's question, the strategy must be developed. It must be part of an overall workforce strategy for Canada.

• (1310)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member talked a bit about pensions and the potential consequences. We know that organizations that have pension plans have periodic actuarial valuations to determine the health of the funding of a pension plan. Sometimes there is an actuarial surplus and one of the problems we have seen in the past is where an organization will withdraw funds from a pension plan because there is a determined actuarial surplus.

However, these things tend to vacillate from time to time and there is some concern whether or not the rules regarding pension surpluses are sound enough to ensure that they do not send the pendulum swinging too far the other way. The other consequence of an actuarial valuation would be to determine an actuarial deficit or shortfall in terms of funding benefits.

I wonder if the member would like to comment on whether or not there should be consideration to legislative changes to deal not only with the surpluses but also with deficits, particularly with regard to locking in funds, taking care of earned benefits, the vested benefits, that either current retirees already enjoy or that other employees may have earned through their period of employment.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, in response to the member's question, should there be better legislation dealing with pension protection? My answer is definitely yes. Although the member would appreciate that it is not a simple federal issue. There are federal components and provincial components.

However, situations have arisen where workers in Canada worked all their life and paid into a pension with the full expectation that the pension would be available when they retired and for some reason, outside their own conduct, that pension is not available or is not available to the level that was expected or agreed upon or contracted for. In those cases, we as legislators have failed those individuals.

The member is aware that the financial press is reporting that up to 50% of the larger pension plans in Canada are presently underfunded. I know the pendulum on stock market performance goes back and forth, but it is a very difficult issue. The actuarial evaluations that are done are very complex. This is something that I am hopeful that we as legislators will address, whether it is a pension or a pension withdrawal. But the point is that we cannot allow workers to lose their pensions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have just heard something that is of particular interest to me. A Liberal member is asking if we should do something to make employee pension funds safer. I find it quite strange to hear such a comment from this member. I do not think that there is one pension fund that can be considered as an employment insurance plan. However, there is one plan that can theoretically be used and that could be very useful for the POWA, the program that was created to help older workers who are laid off and who have a hard time finding new jobs. That is the subject before us today.

This plan is managed by the government. Would the government not agree to first make the employment insurance fund safer and then to create an independent fund? It is interesting that they want to get involved in private pension plans when there is a public plan in which the government has not invested a penny. It prefers to usurp the whole Employment Insurance fund, depriving workers of the benefits to which they are entitled. What do they think about that?

[*English*]

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, the EI fund is used not only for younger workers, middle aged workers, but older workers. Any worker who loses his or her job or is displaced from the workforce is, first of all, eligible for EI benefits. That is the first step in this process.

Second, we have the older worker pilot project that was initiated five years ago. The province of Quebec has taken advantage of this program. I believe that about half the funds that were spent on this have gone to the province of Quebec. It deals with specific closures where the workers are having unique problems getting re-employed. There is also the skills training initiative, but the employment insurance program is available for that purpose.

• (1315)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my allotted time with the hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou.

The Bloc Québécois has asked on three separate occasions in the House of Commons for a new program to assist older workers.

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In my riding of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, we have a number of workers who need such a program. Since December 2004, I have been making representation after representation to the successive ministers at Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, giving them chapter and verse on the situation of the former employees of the Abitibi-Consolidated plant in La Baie. These employees lost their jobs after it was announced that the Port-Alfred plant was closing down for good on January 26, 2005.

I want to emphasize that the minister and member for Westmount—Ville-Marie was unresponsive to the situation of these workers. She never showed any interest in helping them. She wanted to brush the issue off by telling me over and over that Quebec was working on a new program, an improved social assistance program. This is the program that was put forward. Former employees will not be required to relinquish assets until March 2006.

But that is not what the workers and their families are asking for or what they need. They will have to relocate to quickly find work elsewhere. I hope that the new minister, the hon. member for Newmarket—Aurora, will stand by what she voted for when she was in the Conservative Party.

A plant closing is already bad enough, but in La Baie, the situation is even more critical. Let me explain.

The plant in La Baie is considered a mature plant because of the age of its workers: 265 are over 50, 208 between 45 and 50, 80 between 40 and 45, and only 14 under 40, for a total of 640 workers who have lost their jobs.

We can see from here how difficult the integration of these workers into the labour market will be. In its purpose and objectives, the Program for Older Worker Adjustment abolished in 1997 acknowledged the difficulties faced by older workers. In light of this current situation affecting the economy of the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region, it is fair to say that theirs is an extremely difficult situation.

The age of this generation of workers and the lack of federal and Quebec assistance programs are just two elements in this problem. There is a third one. The plant closure announcement severs the employment connection with the company and results in the loss of the right to a pension at age 58. If the plant had not closed down, most workers would have retired at age 58. But now, they have to wait until 65 to get a pension. A worker who is 50 has to wait 15 years instead of the normal 8 years before he can get his pension, even if he paid for that pension.

Even if the federal government is not responsible for this situation, it has to support these workers who feel they have been ripped off in every way.

• (1320)

The EI program is there for this kind of situation. POWA can be used to respond to this problem.

Obviously, this government suffers from amnesia. It forgot that the purpose of the EI program is to provide temporary financial assistance to the unemployed while they are looking for another job or are upgrading their skills.

I met with the union representatives of the Port-Alfred plant, and I talked with workers. It is easy to understand their feeling of unfairness. They have been betrayed by the company they worked for during many years. They have been duped by the Quebec government. And they were let down by the federal government, which is responsible for the EI program to which they contributed for years and from which they should now get benefits when they need them.

Former workers and their families do not want to live on EI benefits and even less on welfare payments. They want us to support them so they can upgrade their skills, start a business, or find a new job.

The Quebec caucus of the Liberal Party supports POWA. According to initial estimates, this program would cost \$55 million the first year, and \$75 million the second year. This is peanuts compared to the employment insurance surpluses, which total \$47 billion. What are the Liberal Party's ministers from Quebec doing in Ottawa? What are they waiting for to demand a POWA?

The impact of the closure of that plant, both at an individual and collective level, is very serious. We want to support these workers and ensure that they do not leave the town of La Baie, or the region. So far, no measure has been taken to avoid a worsening of the situation. A program must be proposed to maximize the integration of workers in new jobs. We have to avoid the negative socio-economic consequences on the community. An improved POWA would allow us to meet the needs of these workers.

The Bloc Québécois' motion proposes a strategy to help older workers who lose their jobs following a plant closure, and this strategy should also include income support measures. Generally speaking, the Bloc Québécois proposes measures whereby the federal government would assist workers when their situation is very precarious.

The Bloc Québécois is asking for the setting up of an income support program for older workers. This program should be part of a global strategy to help these workers.

I also want to remind the House that, in the report tabled on February 15, 2005, by the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, recommendation No. 13 proposed income support measures to help workers, including the possibility of paying additional benefits beyond the maximum period of 50 weeks.

I will conclude by saying that I hope the minister and member for Newmarket—Aurora will act quickly to put in place a POWA program and help Port-Alfred plant workers. I hope she will correct this injustice and will be consistent with herself following the vote in which she took part not long ago, on this side of the House, when she was still a Conservative member, before joining the Liberal ranks.

• (1325)

Mr. Sébastien Gagnon (Jonquière—Alma, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to congratulate my colleague, the member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, for his speech as well as for the work he has done in the last months and in the last year.

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It is not easy for my colleague. Indeed, he had to deal with factory closures in his own riding. It is not easy either for his colleagues, the members from the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region. They have experienced major disputes in the last years, particularly the softwood lumber dispute and the mad cow crisis. Today, these disputes are threatening all the industries in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region because of the whole context of globalization, which means producing more with less employees.

As you know, this government manages the employment insurance program. This program has generated surpluses of about \$50 billion in the last 10 years. This is absurd, because we are not using these \$50 billion to help those who really need it.

I would like to ask my colleague about this, because he met Port-Alfred workers who are affected by this situation. Entire families have found themselves without an income. Yet, in small communities such as La Baie, God knows how it is important to have a family income to ensure that these people can earn a living from their work. These people are not seeking handouts. They just want some assistance, for which Canadians pay every day by going to work and for which employers pay as well. The role of this government is simply to manage this money, and it does not do so appropriately.

I would like my colleague to tell us what really happened in Port-Alfred and how the motion tabled by the Bloc Québécois today will make a difference in helping those who really need it.

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, in Ville de La Baie, the Abitibi-Console plant was shut down, and 640 workers were permanently laid off in January 2005. As provided for by the employment insurance program, these 640 workers will receive benefits. However, as of the month of August, that is to say in a few weeks, this employment insurance will cease. Between the months of August and November, these people will gradually stop receiving benefits. After that period, if the government does not put into place a POWA program aimed at providing income support, these people will have but one choice, namely to go on improved social assistance.

I am referring to regular social assistance, but, in addition, people are exempted until March 2006, so that they do not have to dispose of their assets in order to survive. That is what these people are currently going through. Indeed, they will experience more uncertain times starting in August and up to November.

[English]

Mr. Charles Hubbard (Miramichi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I certainly can empathize with the hon. member for Quebec, because in the New Brunswick forest sector and in fact in the forest sector across this country of ours we have tremendous problems of new technologies and older mills, with competition from countries around the world that will be supplying some of the products that Canadian industry has supplied in the past.

In New Brunswick a few years ago, when Frank McKenna was premier of our province, he had a program for older workers. It was called a 50-plus program and was for workers over 50 years of age. He instituted that program by coming to the federal government and working out a relationship by which older workers would be offered opportunities to work in various sectors, sometimes in the private

sector. It was a program that worked very well for about 1,000 people in New Brunswick.

It has not been continued by our present New Brunswick government, but I can assure members that older workers certainly need opportunities. They need to feel that they are part of their communities, that they are contributing to their society, and I would suggest to the member that he should go to his own province, which might come to us, and look for an older workers program, whatever it might be.

• (1330)

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, first, here is what I would like to respond to the honourable member. Plant closures, in this case, of a paper mill like the one we had in Ville de La Baie, are consequences of globalization. These specialized workers, after 20, 25 or 30 years of experience, can only work in the paper industry. They must be trained to work in other sectors. Moreover, jobs have to be found for them.

It is normal for the federal government to step in, as it is the one managing the employment insurance fund. Given the fact that workers, year in and year out, paid employment insurance premiums, it would only be fair that there be a program to help them.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today we are debating a new program to help older workers who have lost their job and cannot find a new one in their field or that matches their knowledge and skills.

The proposed program would be based on an old program called Program for Older Worker Adjustment, or POWA, but would be a version adapted to the new reality and in line with the vision and recommendations of qualified individuals in the labour sector who are members of a coalition of the four major labour federations in Quebec. But do not worry, they all or almost all have links with other labour federations in Canada, the United States and even Europe.

The new program would be called the income security program for older workers. Its terms and conditions were developed after extensive consultations held by my distinguished colleague from Chambly—Borduas. It would be a program aimed at workers 50 and older—but that could change according to agreements reached—who have been victim of mass layoffs or plant closures, regardless of industry or community. But I will let my distinguished colleague describe the program in greater detail.

This program is as vital today as it was in the late 1980s, in large part because of this government's lack of vision and, perhaps worse still, its lack of concern for the workers, whom it considered nothing more than a source of funds for this country. Its main concern was reserved for the big banks and corporations rather than for those who are the source of this government's great wealth.

It has neglected to consider the impact of technological change and changes in the market economy. The economy has been completely turned upside down by what they call globalization, but I call internationalization. In the process recognized by our governments, with their predilection for the financial establishment, not one environmental, social, commercial or ethical regulation, either tacit or explicit, has been included in the various agreements on free trade and international exchange.

As a result, we find the least scrupulous businesses closing down here in order to move their operations to these havens of lack of concern for humans or the environment, be it local or global. The ones that do not do so are exhausting most of their resources in a struggle to survive despite the government's thinly disguised pressures to commit hara-kiri.

In fact, by refusing these companies the financial assistance they need to fight the unfair competition from certain other countries advantaged by their financial and environmental complacency, this government is forcing them to close down in the end.

Unfortunately, our own government is actively involved in the disappearance of our businesses. One need look no further for an example than the transfer of the printing of our bank notes from a Montreal firm to a German one. What could be more intimately linked to a country's very being than its money? I find that shocking.

Then there is the softwood lumber sector. It would have been simple to provide these businesses with help, particularly when the government could have got its loans back readily because of the rulings in all the courts. But instead it let the situation deteriorate and paved the way for the American establishment to get its hands on our resources more readily. This same government, considered today by everyone to be the best possible example of corruption, with a leader whose legitimacy is questionable, has added to the already very substantial revenues of the oil and gas companies at the expense of the public purse and, worse yet, at the expense of the mining companies which were already begging for help.

Speaking of the leader of this government, is he not the perfect example of a saboteur in our country? He is the one who legalized capital evasion to tax havens for himself and his magnificent friends. Is he not the one who flies flags of convenience on his ships so as not to have to contribute to the economy of the very country he is leading, thereby allowing himself to violate basic environmental rules? Is he not also the one who fired his Canadian staff and replaced them with foreign workers, who he pays less than the minimum wage in this country?

• (1335)

Because he wanted to fight the fundamental right to form a union in this country, it is not surprising to see him disappear during votes on improving labour laws. We also know that he even orders his ministerial servants to vote against any labour improvement initiatives. It is unbelievable the appeal a limousine can have to some people and the price they are willing to pay. The price of government limousines, in terms of moral compromise, is quite high.

My riding and the entire region it is located in are beleaguered by the inaction of and delay tactics used by this government over the past decade or so, but especially since the current Prime Minister

Supply

took his post as finance minister. He stifled the mining and forestry industries. He created astronomical unemployment rates that affect the entire regional economy and prompt the exodus of young people and specialized workers, denying the local industry and commerce of over \$66 million a year since 1996. Let us not forget, that is when he replaced the Unemployment Insurance Act with the Employment Insurance Act, a stupid idea if ever there was one.

Yes, before 1996, under the Unemployment Insurance Act, a worker who lost his job knew that his benefits would be based on maximum insurable earnings of \$47,900, and a benefit rate between 55% and 60%.

Nothing is too good for the working class. In the case of the Prime Minister, the trust legislation was retroactive. The difference is that it was meant to help friends of the Minister of Finance save money.

The maximum insurable earnings were lowered from \$47,900 to \$39,700, and, on top of that, the benefit rate dropped from 60% to 55%, and there was a penalty for each successive benefit period.

Today, we are talking to a young former Conservative who has certainly never experienced unemployment. She has no other political quality or merit except breaking ranks with her former party, and her only obligation now is that she should not think or decide for herself, even if her position was the complete opposite when she was a Conservative. She even trashes what she used to cherish. Talk about renewing trust in politicians.

Even if this government took \$47 billion from the fund, it keeps taking more money illegally and without permission, and gives no thought at all to indexing benefits. They were already too low back in 1995, when we still had the Unemployment Insurance Act.

The current Prime Minister, then Minister of Finance, reduced by 82.88% the baseline used to calculate the benefit rate, and then reduced to 10% the benefit calculated according to this rate. This is serious. The Prime Minister has stifled the unemployed since 1996 by reducing a 1996 benefit by close to 20%. A similar benefit was used to help older workers until March 31, 1997. Since then, there is no more support program and many workers have had to rely on social assistance to make ends meet until they get their pension.

Most of those workers have been working since they were 13, 14, 15 or even 16 years old. When one of them is unlucky enough to lose his or her job, he or she has generally been working for some 40 years, with very few periods of unemployment, for the luckiest of them.

Many of those workers have worked for the same company all their life and they only know the type of work they have been doing all their life. The statistics are very revealing. These people only constitute 12.5% of the labour force, but they represent 21.3% of the long-term unemployed.

How bitter are these workers when they see their leaders blow all this money on sponsorship programs? This tragicomedy is disgusting.

I could go on like that for a long while, but I will now let the others have the floor.

Supply

• (1340)

Mr. Sébastien Gagnon (Jonquière—Alma, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first I want to congratulate my colleague from Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou on his explanations and remarks.

Like me, my colleague is from Abitibi-Témiscamingue, a region that has had its share of crises in various industries. It was hard hit by the mad cow crisis and the softwood lumber dispute.

In his remarks, he drew my attention to an important point. I am talking about the cornerstone of regional development. What is it? I am talking about young people, who are leaving the regions to train in the major centres because the governments are not putting adequate levers at their disposal so they can return or, at least, have an incentive to return. Finding a job in these regions is extremely difficult.

I can mention dozens of examples of people I met in the cities, such as Marc Therrien, an old friend, and Gino East, who is also from Abitibi. They want the government to stand up for once and provide real aid—particularly important levers such as EI—to the regions of Quebec.

There is \$50 billion in this fund. Why not take this money and try to find pilot projects and ways to develop the regions?

Today, the government has an opportunity to help another category of workers, older workers, who have lost their jobs and whom we want to help re-enter the labour force.

My question for my colleague is as follows. Since he lives on a daily basis in the Abitibi region, I want him to explain just how important such levers are to this region and its development, and not just to older workers but to young Quebecers as well.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that, in regions outside the major urban centres, those who are no longer working or finding work in their fields are bound to migrate to these centres. This will have the effect of causing a population explosion in major urban centres and a workforce drain in the regions. The most competent leave the regions to get into fields that are familiar to them. As for older workers, who have always been employed in one business, they will try to find a cheaper place to live. That is disappointing for them.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to put a question to my hon. colleague who shares in many ways the same region that I do.

When we have shutdowns in our mines in Kirkland Lake, we find our workforce going to Val-d'Or and Malarctic. Now with Sigma Mines shutting down, many of those families are now coming into my region to work because they are mining people and they have to move with the jobs.

We find moving more difficult for older workers. If they are of a mining background, people do not want to hire older workers. It is difficult for them to travel outside a region when the costs to move to cities are so much higher than they are to move to places like Malarctic, Timmins or Kirkland Lake.

In general, in regions in the north we are losing population and we are losing our young people at an alarming rate. Older families are now starting to move in with their children. I would like to ask the hon. member, how does he see the future vitality of his region? I am not talking in terms of just economics, but in terms of the vitality of a region. There is a continual loss of families, people and jobs out of these regions into either large urban centres or overseas to places like China and El Salvador.

• (1345)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. He is very much aware of the problems experienced in our region because he has experienced them as well, at certain times. When things start looking up in his riding, they are on the downturn in mine.

There is a major problem in all this. Indeed, when highly experienced and competent workers, in the mining industry for example, are laid off, potential employers considered them high-risk employees, particularly for disease and accidents, and therefore are very hesitant to hire them. Since mining is a declining industry, these workers will be unable to find work in their region. They will be replaced with younger ones, even in companies servicing the businesses that will continue to operate.

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Edmonton—Sherwood Park.

It is a pleasure for me to rise and speak to this Bloc motion that is before the House. The motion reads:

That, in the opinion of the House, due to the increasing number of factory closures associated with globalization, the government should establish a strategy to help older workers who lose their jobs, a strategy that should include income support measures.

I am the former Conservative critic for international trade and now for emerging markets. I have gone around the world and have seen the impact of globalization, not only on Canada but across the world as economies open up. It creates a change in the economy. As we develop new opportunities for Canada, at the same time we will lose some ground. This is not only a unique feature to Canada but to every country due to globalization.

Canada is a trading nation. Close to over 42% of our GDP is tied to international trade. International trade becomes a critically important part of Canada's prosperity.

As many of my colleagues and people who have come before our committee have said, globalization has been extremely beneficial and has given unprecedented prosperity around the world. Nevertheless, it has some drawbacks. We lose workers and some factories close down. This is the case here.

When those factories close down, it becomes natural to retrain the younger workforce. We have many retraining programs in order to send these individuals back into the workforce. At the end of the day, it is beneficial for Canada to have more people at work.

Naturally, it is with those older workers, and that includes myself now, where we see a need and training becomes difficult. It is not because they do not want to be trained. Other factors come into play that make it difficult for them to be retrained. It is natural that we as a country should ensure that we support these workers. They have been out in the workforce and they have helped to build this country. When these unfortunate circumstances do take place, it does not mean that we close our eyes and walk away.

My party will be supporting the motion before us, as will other parties. We recognize the importance of having people in the workforce, irrespective of age.

As recently as this week, Ontario removed the retirement age of 65. We recognize that we need the expertise that is out there. We need older workers. Our economy is growing and we have a shortage of skilled labour as well.

We need these people to come back into the workforce as quickly as possible. This is a way to help them and ensure that they are employed. It is our responsibility to ensure that Canadians get the first choice in jobs. We want to help them in whatever capacity we can. This motion talks about bringing these people back into the workforce. It is a timely motion that I do not think anybody in their right mind would not support. It is a pleasure for us to support the motion.

Many people have talked about factory closures. The riding beside me has suffered textile closures due to globalization. On many occasions my colleague representing that riding has stood in the House and spoken about the plight of workers in his riding because of this globalization issue. We recognize that factory closures do take place and there is a need for us to address this issue. This issue of factory closures and globalization is being addressed all over the world.

• (1350)

Can the globalization march be stopped? No, it cannot be stopped. It is something that has brought a tremendous amount of prosperity to all.

As I have mentioned, we are a trading nation and we need these kinds of agreements to ensure that we have outside market access. We are a country of only 30 million people with a huge amount of resources. Who will we sell these resources to? It will not be to ourselves. We need to trade.

I and my party support the principles of the WTO because we need a rules based system where larger economies do not nudge us out because we do not have deep pockets, as does our neighbour to the south or the European Union. Naturally, from all aspects my party has supported the concept of the WTO and globalization because we believe that in the final analysis globalization is beneficial to Canada.

As I and many colleagues have stated before, we have pinpointed some negative aspects of that but, nevertheless, it impacts

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Canadians. It is a pleasure for me to support the motion to recognize that older people who may lose their jobs require support from us.

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to have the privilege to stand once again in the House and talk about an issue that is important to Canadians.

I have a lot of sympathy for people who are over the age of 50 or 55 who lose their jobs, especially in the current situation in this country when many of them find themselves unqualified for some of the new positions that might be available to people just out of university. Some of these older workers have been trained in older technology.

When I first started teaching many years ago I actually taught my math students to use a slide rule because computers had not yet been invented.

An. hon. member: What's that?

Mr. Ken Epp: Some people here do not even know what a slide rule is. What we are dealing with here is the competition between young people and older people who have been trained in different technology.

An hon. member: What is a computer?

Mr. Ken Epp: One of my friends has asked what a computer is. He is about my age so he is a little bit behind the times too.

The real challenge is the number of people who need extra training. The motion today has to do with people who lose their jobs because of factory closure, which is an increasing factor nowadays because of globalization and the fact that a lot of our manufacturing jobs are leaving this country for other parts of the world where labour is a lot less expensive.

However there are many other reasons for people losing their jobs but for people who lose their job at age 50, 55 or older, it is very difficult for them to gain employment that is both meaningful and sufficient enough to help them pay their bills. There is no doubt in my mind that we should have a national strategy to deal with this.

I have done quite a bit of thinking over the years about income support for people whose time in the workplace has come to an end. I do not know if members will recall my unhappy experience in the 2000 election when some of the ideas I was putting forward with respect to retirement income were quite badly represented. However that was another issue. Today we are talking about people who are not quite old enough to retire. I am a little afraid to be thinking out loud here lest suddenly I be misinterpreted but I really do believe that we need to address the important questions.

One of the real important issues, and it is a basic fundamental issue that must be dealt with, is with respect to who should pay for employment insurance benefits or retirement benefits. Should it be the current taxpayers? Should the people currently earning money pay for the benefits for those who have lost their jobs or who, because they have reached retirement age, quit their jobs? Should their income come from the next generation or should part of the retired person's income come from his or her earnings over a lifetime?

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I get very frustrated by the fact that we have two systems in this country. One system encourages individuals to look after themselves for retirement through the purchase of RRSPs. For people facing the possibility of unemployment, we have the idea of savings income. We also have the public fund where the money comes from current taxpayers and current earners. The EI program is one of those.

It is true that most people who are eligible for benefits in the EI program are those who have been paying into the fund. However, in most instances, people who receive benefits are usually eligible for benefits quite in excess of the sum of their contributions into the program over the years. That is what an insurance program is about.

• (1355)

Most of us who have car insurance go through life without ever having made a claim. I happen to be one of those. I have never had a claim where I was charged. I have had guys plough into me and then they had to pay or their insurance had to pay. I have paid faithfully into that fund but even now, if I were to have a major claim, one involving a public liability, it is possible that the claim would exceed the sum of what I have paid in, and so it is with EI. It is the same thing with the retirement benefits. Some people gain less in benefits compared to what they pay in and others pay more.

The Deputy Speaker: We will resume the member's speech after question period with another four and a half minutes or so.

We will now proceed to statements by members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

YOUNG CANADIANS CHALLENGE

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): On Sunday, June 5, five Etobicoke students were among 105 young people nationally to receive the Duke of Edinburgh Award for their participation in the Young Canadians Challenge achievement program.

The overriding goal of the Young Canadians Challenge, which was first launched in 1963, has been to encourage the involvement of young people in their communities. I would like to extend my congratulations to Sonya Bikhit, Melinda Maggisano, Michael Stasyna, David Wiley and Mary Kathleen Wiley for their commitment to community service.

These five Etobicoke students are further proof that “kids these days” are good kids, and these Etobicoke five are a perfect example.

* * *

• (1400)

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as co-chair of the parliamentary border caucus, I greatly appreciated the sincerity of our ambassador to the United States. He reminded us that, almost four years after the events of September 11 and after more than 11 years under a Liberal government, we still have a security problem along our border.

According to the ambassador, large quantities of drugs and weapons are still being smuggled into Canada. Moreover, the Customs and Excise union keeps reminding us that its members must work without protection and in unsafe conditions.

Last year alone, over 1,600 vehicles crossed border points without stopping, and more than 200 roads remain unmonitored.

I am urging the Deputy Prime Minister to make national security a priority.

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[*English*]

MISSISSAUGA CITIZEN OF THE YEAR

Mr. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate an outstanding citizen from Mississauga, Ontario. Mr. Jake Dheer was recently named the winner of the prestigious Gordon S. Shipp Memorial Award as Mississauga's Citizen of the Year.

Mr. Dheer won this award for the dedication that he has shown to his community. He has repeatedly demonstrated his commitment through his varied volunteer work. Mr. Dheer has assisted many organizations such as the Mississauga Central Lions Club, Community Living Mississauga, Carassauga, the United Way, the Mississauga Chinese Business Association, Big Brothers and Big Sisters, and the local hospitals, and the list goes on.

Once again, on behalf of the residents of Mississauga—Brampton South, I would like to congratulate Mr. Dheer for his hard work and dedication. We need more ambassadors like him.

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[*Translation*]

LA JOLIE ROCHELLE CAMPGROUND

Mr. Réal Lapierre (Lévis—Bellechasse, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the La Jolie Rochelle campground on winning first prize in the campground accommodation category, at the 20th Quebec tourism awards gala.

This success is the result of the efforts of the owners and employees of La Jolie Rochelle in providing personalized and diversified services in a beautiful setting.

The success of the La Jolie Rochelle campground, which is located on the shore of the Rivière-du-Sud, in Saint-Raphaël, is a reflection of the vibrant and dynamic tourism industry in the Chaudière-Appalaches region.

This recognition is proof that regions can take charge of their destiny and diversify their economy. Recreational tourism knows no borders. Back home, this activity is increasingly popular and it complements an already very impressive picture.

I invite my colleagues to come and experience it. They will find it very pleasurable and invigorating.

The La Jolie Rochelle campground has a great future ahead. Congratulations.

[English]

CANADIAN COUNCIL OF THE BLIND

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Council of the Blind is a national self-help organization of persons who are blind, deaf-blind or visually impaired. It is recognized as Canada's voice of blind Canadians and its motto is, "A lack of sight is not a lack of vision".

There are 85 chapters in Canada. On May 25, I had the pleasure of attending a ceremony to celebrate the Brantford Robert Troughton Memorial Chapter's expansion of its facility to 3,300 square feet. Among others involved in the event were Marie Myke, president, Dennis Finucan, executive director, and Mr. Gord Hope.

In November 2004, a Brantford youth chapter was created, named after the late Don Bethune, a very fine citizen of Brantford and former principal of the W. Ross McDonald School.

My sincere congratulations are extended to the Brantford chapter of the Canadian Council of the Blind.

* * *

JEAN MINGUY

Mr. Darrel Stinson (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last Friday the city of Vernon in my riding lost a respected member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in the line of duty in a tragic boating accident on Okanagan Lake.

Constable Jean Minguy was a 23 year veteran of the force, who passed away less than seven months after the Vernon detachment also lost in the line of duty RCMP auxiliary officer Glen Evely, killed when the police cruiser in which he was a passenger was hit by a stolen vehicle.

Tomorrow many dignitaries will take part in a full regimental funeral to help the Vernon detachment carry this terrible load of sadness and loss.

Here in Ottawa, many also join me in honouring both Constable Minguy and all the members of the RCMP. To each of them and their families, we express our thanks and extend our heartfelt sympathy.

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[Translation]

FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL DE THÉÂTRE DE MONT-LAURIER

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it was with great pride that I attended the official launch of the second Festival international de théâtre de Mont-Laurier on May 16, in my riding.

This cultural event, unique in North America, will run from September 4 to 10, 2005. A big multi-purpose stage will host 17 troupes from various countries around the world. Over seven days, the people of the Upper Laurentians will have an opportunity to come in contact with vibrant and moving cultures.

A tip of the hat to all those working flat out to make this festival an international success. I offer special thanks to my colleague from Saint-Lambert, who has agreed to be the honorary chair of the event.

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I invite one and all not to miss the double rendez-vous my region is offering with nature and culture.

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• (1405)

[English]

PARISH ANNIVERSARY

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the Holy Name of Jesus parish as its members celebrate the 40th anniversary of their church within the anglophone Catholic community of Laval.

Over the years, the parish has helped to create a strong sense of community. This was evident when over 400 people, including me, attended a mass on May 15, presided over by His Eminence Jean-Claude Cardinal Turcotte, and a gala on May 27. The pride, respect and thanks were obvious among the parishioners.

Forty years later, the history of Laval is intertwined with the history of the anglophone Catholic community of Ile-Jésus. On behalf of all the residents of Laval—Les Îles, I extend congratulations to its members for being a part of our community and making it dynamic and caring. I ask them to keep up the good work.

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YARD SALE FOR THE CURE

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a courageous individual in my riding. Rachael Smith was the inspiration and motivation for the first ever Beaches—East York Yard Sale for the Cure on May 28. This innovative event raised money for breast cancer research and treatment through neighbourhood yard sales.

I was proud to support the event and to see the community of Beaches—East York rally in support of Yard Sale for the Cure by donating a portion of all of the proceeds of the individual yard sales to help those afflicted by this terrible disease.

One hundred per cent of the money raised by Yard Sale for the Cure has been donated to the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation, the Toronto East General Hospital oncology unit, and the Campbell Family Institute for Breast Cancer Research at the Princess Margaret Hospital.

As Yard Sale for the Cure plans to expand nationwide, I ask the House to join me in congratulating Rachael Smith and Yard Sale for the Cure and wish her luck for the future.

* * *

OUTSTANDING SERVICE AWARD

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on April 20 of this year, I had the honour of attending the medals and awards ceremony at the RCMP D Division headquarters in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

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There, the Commissioner's Commendation Unit Ensign for Outstanding Service was presented to the ICE Unit, the Manitoba Integrated Child Exploitation Unit. This joint forces unit was comprised of police officers from the RCMP and the Winnipeg and Brandon police forces. This highest award was given for outstanding work at the national level, stopping child exploitation all across our nation.

Child exploitation and child pornography are heinous crimes that must be stopped. These police officers have sacrificed much to catch and convict these criminals. It was with much gratitude that I shook each individual police officer's hand. They stood proudly while honoured for a difficult job well done. It was a special honour for me as my own son was one of those officers honoured that day.

As a member of Parliament and as a mom, I am proud to stand here today to commend those officers.

* * *

CANADIAN ENVIRONMENT WEEK

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge Canadian Environment Week, celebrated every year at the beginning of June. The theme this year is "Taking Action for our Environment", recognizing the important role all Canadians have to play in ensuring the health of our environment.

A clean, healthy environment is vital to our economy and prosperity and the quality of life of all Canadians. Natural Resources Canada supports the aims of Canadian Environment Week by working to balance economic, social and environmental considerations through our mandate for the sustainable development of Canada's natural resources.

In particular, we are working with our partners to raise awareness about climate change, waste reduction and clean air. The one tonne challenge is a new Government of Canada climate change initiative calling on all Canadians to use less energy and fewer resources in our daily activities so that we each reduce our annual greenhouse gas emissions by one tonne.

Sustainable development, one of the key objectives of the Government of Canada, is within our reach. Canadian Environment Week provides an opportunity for all Canadians to take part.

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• (1410)

INCOME TRUSTS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, six years ago Ottawa promised to make it harder to hide money in offshore tax havens. Nothing happened.

In the meantime, a much larger tax avoidance scheme is sweeping the business community like wildfire as whole industry sectors are becoming tax fugitives by restructuring themselves as income trusts. This income trust revolution erodes tax revenue in two ways. Income trusts do not pay corporate taxes, thanks to loopholes in Canada's tax laws, and distributions paid out to unit holders can be viewed as a return on capital instead of income for the purpose of taxation.

We need to be clear with Canadians about the implications of income trusts. When corporations do not pay their taxes, citizens

pick up the tab in the form of higher taxes, more service fees and cuts to social programs.

The tax loopholes that allow income trusts to avoid taxes should be eliminated. Canadian tax laws should be structured to provide revenue to government and to encourage growth and reinvestment. Income trusts do neither.

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HEPATITIS C

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for far too long the Liberal government's inaction and indecision on hepatitis C have delayed compensation for those in need and the quality of life they lose is the direct fault of the government. Its arbitrary decision to provide limited compensation for those afflicted is undeniably callous.

There is over \$1 billion sitting in a compensation fund for victims of tainted blood and it is not being delivered. Meanwhile, more than \$250,000 a month is being spent on administrative costs. On top of this, the Liberal government is taxing the benefits. This is unbelievable and inexcusable.

I met recently with a victim of this plight in Central Nova. He advised me that his treatment costs over \$1,800 a month, which does not calculate the pain and suffering that he and other victims and their families endure on a daily basis.

The magnitude of this colossal tragedy for thousands of Canadians cannot be ignored any longer. I call on the Minister of Health to live up to the unanimous decision of this House to compensate all victims immediately. It is the right thing to do. The government should act.

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[Translation]

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF CHAPAIS

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, June 26 will mark the 50th anniversary of the municipality of Chapais in my riding of Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou.

With a sense of both pleasure and pride, I take the occasion of this celebration to pay tribute to the courage and tenacity of all the residents of Chapais, who, together, have created a vibrant and welcoming community.

Between 1955 and 2005, Chapais had its share of blows, including the federal government's indifference to its economic development, but it has also embraced exciting initiatives, which have given fresh energy to people looking to the future. Through their determination and spirit of initiative, the people of Chapais together can look to the future enthusiastically.

I am very proud to represent such a warm and valiant group of people. May this celebration bring back wonderful memories and provide an opportunity for some happy reunions.

Long live Chapais.

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[English]

SENIORS

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the United Nations has proclaimed the first full week of June as Seniors Week and many Canadian provinces recognize June as Seniors Month.

During this month, as well as throughout the entire year, it is important for all Canadians to remember the tremendous contribution that our seniors have made and continue to make to the social and economic well-being of Canada. This is our opportunity to recognize all Canadian seniors for their past and continued contribution to this society.

Today there are over four million Canadians over the age of 65. This number continues to grow. They are our parents, grandparents, neighbours and friends. They are the wisdom keepers who remind us of from where we have come. They provide encouragement and inspiration for future generations. The role they play in our society is in fact irreplaceable.

As I undertake the role of official opposition critic for seniors issues, I will work diligently on behalf of Canadian seniors. I call on all hon. members to join me in celebrating Seniors Week and recognizing the continued contribution of Canadian seniors.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the last federal election the Prime Minister vowed to take action to improve and reinforce our public health care system. Promise made, promise kept.

The Prime Minister's leadership resulted in a health accord that will invest \$41 billion over 10 years to strengthen health care. This includes significant investments to reduce wait times in priority areas like cancer, heart, diagnostic imaging, joint replacements and sight restoration.

Nothing is more important than achieving results. That is why the government is working closely with the provinces and territories to develop performance indicators and targets to ensure that wait times are indeed reduced.

There is much to be done. That is why we remain dedicated to working with the provinces and territories to guarantee success. We are guided by an unwavering commitment to universal public health care and to the Canada Health Act. Unlike the official opposition, we remain dedicated to strengthening health care in Canada.

Oral Questions

• (1415)

[Translation]

JOCELYN MASSÉ

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it was with a heavy heart that we learned of the tragic death of a young student from the Magdalen Islands.

Last Saturday, Jocelyn Massé, aged 21, was travelling on a bus in Honduras with his girlfriend, Mélanie Poirier, when two armed robbers boarded the vehicle and opened fire, killing Mr. Massé.

An athlete, music lover and travel and adventure enthusiast, Jocelyn Massé loved life. He adored his family and had a great many friends. He was also very much in love with Mélanie.

Today, the entire community of the Magdalen Islands is in mourning and heartbroken over the loss of this young man who had such big plans for his future. The Bloc Québécois extends its deepest sympathies to his family, friends and Mélanie Poirier, the love of his life, to whom we wish much courage at this time.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today's decision from the Supreme Court opens the door to further deterioration of the publicly funded health care system in Canada. The Canadian Medical Association stated, "medically necessary health care delayed is health care denied".

Due to the cuts imposed by the Prime Minister for over a decade, Canadians' timely access to health care was the victim of political decisions of the Liberal government. As minister of finance, he was the architect of those cuts.

Further court actions could destroy the underpinnings of the Canada Health Act. What will the Prime Minister do to ensure that Canada's universally accessible, publicly funded health care system is preserved?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise as the leader of the party that brought medicare into being.

The focus of the Supreme Court decision was on wait times. That was what we brought forth during the election campaign and that was the principal subject of the federal-provincial conference which we convened.

At that time, we set out a wait times fund. We set out a human resources strategy. We set out national benchmarks and accountability by individual governments to their citizens. All this is because we want to maintain the publicly funded, universally accessible health care system.

Oral Questions

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality is the Prime Minister and that party brought medicare into peril. The Prime Minister himself may benefit from a parallel health system but most Canadians cannot.

Ten years ago the Prime Minister, then finance minister, took \$25 billion out of the health care system. Downloading of costs to the provinces and increasing the wait times for patients are the direct result of his actions. The Prime Minister said that he brought in a health care fix for a generation. In reality, Canadians may suffer lengthy wait times for another generation to fix health care.

How could Canadians possibly believe the Prime Minister has solutions when he is the perpetrator of the problem?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a very important debate and really does not require a great deal of historical revisionism.

I happened to have been in the House when that member's party day after day stood up and said that the transfers to the provinces should be cut far greater than they were. Take a look at the scorched earth policy that his party recommended.

What we should now do is understand that we have a very complex decision. That complex decision should be debated, not be subject to the kind of catcalls that we now are hearing, the kinds of inane statements that we are hearing from the opposition.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is a stranger to the truth. He knows he cut \$25 billion from health care.

The Supreme Court's decision today says:

The evidence shows that, in the case of certain surgical procedures, the delays that are the necessary result of waiting lists increase the patient's risk of mortality or the risk that his or her injuries will become irreparable.

Wait times have doubled under the Liberal government. There is no plan and with the Prime Minister's one-off deals with the provinces he has created the potential for a 10 tier system of private-public health care.

What will the Prime Minister do to address this patchwork system of health care for Canadians and how does he respond to Quebec's demands today?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member has called a one-off province by province was an agreement for \$41 billion over 10 years, signed by every province and territory. It is an agreement that sets out a detailed wait time strategy. It also demonstrates the absolute urgency of establishing the benchmarks. We have met with the Wait Times Alliance and the medical profession. There is a meeting going on now of deputy ministers of health to deal with this very urgent problem of wait times.

• (1420)

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under 12 years of Liberal rule, the health care system has deteriorated. The Prime Minister, who goes to a private Montreal clinic, does not care that wait times have doubled for the average Canadian.

Today's landmark court decision is an indictment of the Liberal neglect and mismanagement. Will the Prime Minister admit that the Liberals have seriously damaged the health care system?

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should remember that there was a meeting of all first ministers in September 2004. An additional \$41 billion was provided over the next 10 years. He should also remember Roy Romanow said at that time that the money far exceeded his recommendations.

We have put in place issues around benchmarks, comparable indicators, a national pharmaceutical strategy and expansion of home care. This is an overhaul of our system to make it better.

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised the member remembers anything. We have heard health care promises from the Liberals for 12 years. They have had a record of broken promises. They have not fixed wait times and no one believes they ever will.

The court has stepped in because of a decade of Liberal mismanagement. Will the government simply admit that it is the Liberal mismanagement that brought us to this point today?

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my memory is neither erased, nor doctored, nor spliced. What the hon. member should remember is that we have provided more than enough money and resources across the country to make our health care system—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Supreme Court of Canada ruling could jeopardize the public health system of Quebec, a system that best serves Quebecers.

Since the Supreme Court ruling unfortunately has the force of law, can the Prime Minister guarantee that there will be no cuts to federal funding, which would penalize Quebec patients who rely on the public system for their health?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member must know that we have transferred in excess of \$41 billion over 10 years precisely to help the provinces, including Quebec of course. Quebec will receive more than \$9 billion over 10 years to address the issue of waiting lists. We have, therefore, already demonstrated, long before the court ruling, how important this is to us.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that was not the question.

With the ruling—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: Stop yelling. Those people often talk about civility, but they rarely display it.

Oral Questions

In light of today's Supreme Court ruling, can the Prime Minister guarantee that there will be no cuts to Quebec's share of federal funding under the agreements? That is the question. I want an answer.

[English]

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, contrary to the implication of the hon. member's question, funding has increased over the last several years. It is more than ever before. It is more than what Romanow had indicated.

The questions are for the opposition members. They wanted market reforms. The Leader of the Opposition talks about maximum flexibility for the private providers and market reforms in health care. That is what will wreck health care.

What is important for health care to make it stronger and better is the resources we have provided across the country.

• (1425)

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Supreme Court ruling today changes things, or could change them. That is the situation.

This is what I want to ask the Prime Minister. Rather than patting himself on the back, could he answer the question? Does this ruling have an impact on federal funding for the health care system in Quebec? Yes or no? Let him explain.

[English]

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the funding is in place for the next 10 years on a basis that is well known to all Canadians, including Quebecers. What is important is I have spoken to Dr. Couillard. He has been on television and in the press saying that this does not call into question the fundamentals of our public health care system, where universal access and equality is protected for all Canadians, including Quebecers.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister mentioned the basis of the agreement. Today, a ruling by the Supreme Court in Ottawa involves changes for Quebec. I am not saying I am pleased with those changes, but there are changes.

Mr. Jean Lapierre: Oh, oh!

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: If the Minister of Transport would stop bellowing, perhaps for once in his life he would understand a question.

This is my question for the Minister of Health. Could he tell me whether Quebec will be penalized in any way by today's ruling?

[English]

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the issue before the court today that the court really ruled upon in essence is the Quebec charter.

It is important for the hon. member to remember that the yelling usually comes from that end. It does not come from this end.

It is also important for him to remember that there is a significant amount of money over the next 10 years that has been promised to

all of the provinces across the country, including Quebec. That money would not go away. It is there for the next 10 years on a basis that is predictable and fair to all Canadians, including Quebecers.

[Translation]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government is claiming that Quebec does not have a two-tier system. The Supreme Court ruling is again sounding the alarm we first raised in this House. There is, for instance, a private clinic in Gatineau where patients can pay only with VISA. Operating rooms in Montreal are up for bids, and patients can be operated on sooner if they can pay.

This is my question for the Prime Minister. If this is not two tiered medicine, then what is it?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our objective is to have the best public, accessible and universal system possible, which is why we called the federal-provincial conference. That is why we invested in excess of \$41 billion over 10 years. That is why, in conjunction with the provinces, we created an entire strategy to reduce waiting times. That strategy is to increase the number of physicians and nurses, and to create a \$4.5 billion fund, strictly with a view to reducing waiting times.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is some history and some facts to be corrected here. The fact is that medicare was brought to this House by Tommy Douglas not in a minority government but through the NDP.

Also, there is not a single word in the health accord of last fall to stop two tier medicine in Canada. There are clinics operating in Vancouver and Toronto where a person has to pay \$2,300 just to get started. In Alberta it is \$600 for an MRI. In Quebec now, people can get an operation faster if they pay.

Are those not examples of two tier medicine? Why will the government not actually act to stop it?

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have written to several of the provinces where there are clinics that are operating possibly in contravention of the Canada Health Act.

I want the hon. member to know it is not the words that stopped two tier from development. It is the money and the resources which we have provided over the next 10 years, \$41 billion for all Canadians from coast to coast, \$4.5 billion of that to reduce wait times across the country.

*Oral Questions***AUDIOTAPED CONVERSATIONS**

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Ethics Commissioner's mandate is to administer the Prime Minister's conflict of interest code for public office holders. Public office holders are defined as "a person other than a public servant who works on behalf of a minister". This definition would include the Prime Minister's chief of staff, and Mr. Murphy has in the past filed reports with the Ethics Commissioner stating he has complied with the code.

The Prime Minister refused to contact the authorities, on one hand, and on the other hand, the Ethics Commissioner says he cannot investigate the chief of staff.

Just who is responsible then for the unethical behavioural of ministerial staff?

• (1430)

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should know that I have said right from the very beginning that my staff and I will corroborate fully. We want all the facts to come out. Nothing will be held back. We will work completely in any way, shape or form that the Ethics Commissioner requests.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would agree it appears that they do not hold anything back in getting votes.

Tim Murphy has filed conflict of interest compliance reports with the Ethics Commissioner as recently as May 31, 2005.

In the Prime Minister's message attached to the conflict of interest code, he states, "Our government must uphold the public trust to the highest possible standard, and this responsibility falls uniquely on all of us as public office holders".

As the holder of the highest public office in Canada, does the Prime Minister believe that having his ministers and his chief of staff discuss illegal vote buying schemes is upholding the public trust to the highest possible standard?

Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member said, the Prime Minister was informed that the member for Newton—North Delta wanted to cross the floor. The Prime Minister said that no offer was to be made. The hon. member did not cross the floor and no offer was made. In fact, as the Prime Minister said, the government will cooperate fully with the Ethics Commissioner.

The difficulty with the member opposite is that he cannot accept yes for an answer.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the health minister and the chief of staff of the Prime Minister were caught red-handed trying to buy votes in order to save that corrupt government.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary Southeast, I am sure, has heard my admonitions in respect of discussion on these matters in the House. Given the Ethics Commissioner's investigation and the letter I received from him, I have given two admonitions on this subject. I would have thought the hon. member would have paid

very close attention to both. I think he knows that while he may get away with mentioning one of the names he mentioned, the other is out of order. He will want to confine his remarks and be very careful in what he says.

Mr. Jason Kenney: Mr. Speaker, what I would like is for the immigration minister to be careful in what he says, because having tried and failed to buy the support of a member of the opposition, the government's approach is then to try to destroy that person. The immigration minister then speculates about deporting that member.

Does threatening to deport a member of Parliament whom the Liberals have failed to buy not reflect more the politics of a banana republic than a modern democracy like Canada?

Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what I find really unfortunate is that the member gets up every day and smears members' reputations in the House and does a disservice to this institution itself.

I find it unbelievable that the member, along with the leader of the official opposition, continues to make assertions based on tapes that have been proven by numerous audio experts to have been manipulated, and not only supports the member, but according to reports, actually condones the taping by the member for Newton—North Delta.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that member stepped aside from his parliamentary responsibilities until this matter is clarified. Why have Liberals not taken similar responsibility?

What we want to know is this: Is it not profoundly irresponsible of the immigration minister to publicly speculate about deporting an elected member of the House of Commons for the crime of not being buyable by the Liberal Party of Canada?

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not know what type of tea the hon. member has been drinking.

I have already said in scums that I have removed myself from any consideration of that member's case, in part because it has now become a specific case and in part because, as you know, Mr. Speaker, I have already submitted something to the Ethics Commissioner on another related matter. I have, in the process, said I will remove myself from any consideration.

Most people went to lunch an hour ago; the hon. member is obviously still there.

* * *

• (1435)

[Translation]

TRANSFER PAYMENTS

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today, the Subcommittee on Fiscal Imbalance tabled its report confirming, based on the opinion of experts and many witnesses heard from coast to coast, that there is indeed a fiscal imbalance in Canada.

Oral Questions

Will the Prime Minister finally admit what everyone recognizes, namely that there is indeed a fiscal imbalance favouring the federal government, and that this fiscal imbalance must be corrected to ensure a better balance in the distribution of financial resources?

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the subcommittee report demonstrates more dissent than agreement.

The facts are these: The federal transfers from the Government of Canada to the provinces are now at an all-time record high. Plus, those transfers combined will increase by more than \$100 billion over the coming decade to help with health care, education, social programs, municipalities, child care and much more. The revenue flows to the provinces have been higher, are higher and will continue to be higher than the revenue flows to the Government of Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, even with his explanations, the Minister of Finance cannot convince any provincial premier or finance minister. So much for those explanations.

Will the Minister of Finance face the facts, recognize the fiscal imbalance and agree to increase his cash transfers for post-secondary education and social programs to 25%, over four years, as he agreed to do for health and as recommended by the subcommittee in its report?

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, transfers are increasing already.

The inconsistency in the hon. gentleman's question is just breathtaking. He asks for a larger transfer for post-secondary education. That is in fact included through assistance to students in Bill C-48 which he opposes.

* * *

[*Translation*]

MEMBER FOR NEWTON—NORTH DELTA

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, 30 years ago, during the Watergate scandal, former President Richard Nixon had to answer two questions: what did he know and when did he know it. Today, in the tape affair, the Prime Minister has to answer the same two questions. He has said an offer was solicited, but he has yet to say when he was informed.

So, I ask the Prime Minister once again when did he know—not his parliamentary leader, but he himself—that the Conservative member was soliciting an offer from his chief of staff? Was it during or after the negotiations?

[*English*]

Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has said that he was informed that the member for Newton—North Delta wanted to cross the floor. The Prime Minister was very clear. He said that no offer was to be made. None was.

I understand that the Bloc leader himself was out scrumming yesterday, indicating that he had contacted the RCMP regarding this matter.

The RCMP itself will determine whether there is anything to investigate. I would suggest that if the hon. member does have any information to provide, he provide it to the RCMP.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if the Prime Minister had known after the negotiations that the Conservative member was trying to sell his vote, we are sure he would have told us, because he would have washed his hands of it.

Why is the Prime Minister still refusing to tell us when he learned of it? Could he have learned during the course of the negotiations and, despite the Criminal Code, have instructed his chief of staff to continue them?

[*English*]

Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it sounds as though the hon. member across the way is conducting his own investigation. I do not understand why they sent a letter to the RCMP to ask for an investigation.

If the Bloc and the hon. member have information that they feel would assist the RCMP in an investigation, and would in fact assist the RCMP in determining whether there should be an investigation or that there is anything to investigate, then I would suggest that the hon. member provide that information to the RCMP.

* * *

● (1440)

AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last November the Minister of Industry stood in this House and promised me that no auto jobs would be lost, despite the failure of the government to develop a national auto strategy.

As today's *Globe and Mail* points out, the recent federal investment in the auto industry allows for a reduction of up to 4,000 jobs at GM, meaning 28,000 spinoff jobs would also be at risk, taxpayer funding in exchange for job losses.

When will the minister admit that the lack of a Liberal auto strategy is killing auto jobs in Ontario?

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the member is full of hot air.

The reality is that the GM plants in Oshawa are among the most productive, the most efficient and the highest quality plants in North America and South America. They are benefiting from major strategic investments by the Government of Canada.

We are working with the auto sector. I talked with the president of General Motors just before question period. He is committed to the Oshawa plants. That member does not know what he is talking about.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only hot air is coming from that minister's commitment to the auto industry.

Oral Questions

I would say that the government is asleep at the wheel, but it is clear that it is not even in the driver's seat. The Liberal-NDP budget will put Canadian auto jobs at risk. The fact that the government is reneging on its promise to provide tax relief for corporations will have a devastating effect on the industry that drives our economy.

Will the minister commit to reinstating corporate tax breaks and finally make auto jobs in Canada a priority?

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, words like that coming from the party that is always complaining about the technology partnerships program which is being used to support the automotive industry boggles the mind.

The Minister of Finance has said over and over again that we will continue to go through with those corporate tax cuts. The Oshawa investment by General Motors will be the largest investment ever made in the Canadian automotive industry.

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FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL RELATIONS

Ms. Rona Ambrose (Edmonton—Spruce Grove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have a Prime Minister who has no national vision and we have a government that has abandoned fiscal imbalance.

In a rush to buy votes, the Prime Minister is willing to sign deals with anyone, anywhere, on anything. By signing ad hoc deals with—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I am sure the hon. member for Edmonton—Spruce Grove appreciates the assistance she is getting with her question but we have to be able to hear the question because somebody is going to have to answer it. I cannot hear it. I do not know how the minister who is going to answer it can possibly hear it. We will listen to the question from the hon. member for Edmonton—Spruce Grove.

Ms. Rona Ambrose: Mr. Speaker, by signing these ad hoc side deals with no consideration for a national framework, the Prime Minister has widened the fiscal imbalance between the provinces.

When will the Prime Minister stop practising patchwork federalism and stop pitting province against province and Canadian against Canadian?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and the government have worked very hard to build strong partnerships with the provinces. That was demonstrated last summer when we achieved the unanimous health care accord that directed \$41 billion into the health care system over the next 10 years. That was followed by an agreement on equalization that brought another \$33 billion into the equation.

All together, over the course of the next 10 years, the Government of Canada will be investing another \$100 billion in the well-being of Canadian provinces and municipalities, and that is good federalism.

Ms. Rona Ambrose (Edmonton—Spruce Grove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has sold off the social and economic fabric of Canada in exchange for votes and undermined federalism.

The leader of the Conservative Party is the only leader with a national vision and he will defend a strong and united Canada.

[Translation]

The Prime Minister is refusing to admit the facts: the fiscal imbalance is real, the imbalance is continuing, and the Liberal tax regime is sick.

Why is the Prime Minister continuing to hide billions of dollars in his mattress and not resolutely attacking the primary source of discord in Canada?

• (1445)

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, amidst the hon. member's criticism I wish she could be specific about what exactly it is she opposes. Does she oppose the health care agreement for \$41 billion? Does she oppose the equalization agreement for \$33 billion? Does she oppose the arrangements for the Atlantic accord? Does she oppose the \$710 million that Saskatchewan has gained in the last 18 months? Does she oppose child care? Does she oppose the money for municipalities?

Rather than the broad brush, she should be specific. What is she against? She cannot tell us what—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre.

* * *

PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY

Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of State for Public Health.

In light of the marburg virus outbreak in Angola, could the minister explain what assistance the Public Health Agency located in Winnipeg is providing in the fight against this deadly disease?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of State (Public Health), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the member joins with us in our pride at the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg and the leadership it has taken with the WHO. The four scientists from there have gone to Angola with this fancy, fabulous portable lab.

In this past week, two scientists, Dr. Heinz Feldmann and Dr. Steven Jones, together with their U.S. collaborators, have developed a vaccine, 100% effective in primates, that will lead to a human vaccine. We are absolutely thrilled that this is furthering the leadership that Canada has in global public health and fighting bioterrorism.

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HEALTH

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, earlier we heard how committed the Liberals are to health care but there is no action on solutions like bulk buying of drugs, no action on a pharmacare plan and no action on implementing public home care.

Today's court decision is a wake-up call. The minister must do more than talk about protecting medicare.

Why is there not one word in the health accord about stopping privatization?

Oral Questions

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is talking about drugs. We have a national pharmaceutical strategy on which all of the provinces, territories and the federal government is working. We are working on the expansion of home care. We are working on the export of drugs to the United States, banning bulk exports and the like.

It is important that we remember that we are doing all of that work while providing \$41 billion to the provinces so that our public health care system is strong and that our universal access to publicly funded health care is strong and remains strong forever in Canada.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is time to quit talking about doing the work and getting on to the action.

Let us talk about the government's record. David Dingwall signed a deal with Alberta that helped Ralph Klein privatize eye surgery. Allan Rock sat there and watched as Canada's first for profit hospitals opened. The minister's predecessor said that private delivery was just fine.

How will the minister bring accountability back into the public health care system?

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a law that Parliament passed that in three years time we will be actually reviewing the performance of all of the provinces and ourselves on the health accord.

It is important that we remember we are enforcing the Canada Health Act. We continue to talk to the provinces where there might be contraventions.

I want to make sure that we continue to work with the provinces to enforce the Canada Health Act.

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BILL C-48

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP are outraged with the Liberals on the one hand and prop them up on the other.

Bill C-48 is now before the finance committee. The Conservative Party has asked that the ministers responsible for foreign aid, housing, infrastructure, post-secondary education and the environment appear before the committee to explain how the money would be spent. Seven ministers in all and they all refused to come. We asked for officials to come and they also all refused.

Is this not just an admission that Bill C-48, the NDP budget deal, is so poorly designed that the government cannot even defend it?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I cannot speak for other ministers but I know I am scheduled to appear before the committee. I think it is on Monday or Tuesday. I will be happy to be there and go through all the details of Bill C-48 with any of my cabinet colleagues who would care to attend with me.

The fact is that this is good legislation. It is delivering on important commitments. I hope the opposition party will ultimately support it.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is great that the leader of the NDP has allowed the minister to come before the committee.

We want to point to the Auditor General's report when it talked about the sponsorship program. She said, "We would have expected the government to provide Parliament with at least a description of the program and its objectives".

None of that is in Bill C-48. This is an expenditure of \$4.6 billion and yet the government refuses to bring forward the minister who would actually have to implement the bill.

Is this not just an admission that the government cannot stand scrutiny on Bill C-48?

• (1450)

Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's question is absolutely false. In fact, there are ministers who have already agreed to appear before the committee. The committee is the master of its own destiny. If it is going to request that ministers appear before the committee, they will.

In fact, I know that ministers would be very pleased to go in front of the finance committee and defend not only in form but to convince the Conservatives to support the legislation because it provides additional money to post-secondary education, affordable housing and foreign aid. It is good policy and they should support it.

* * *

CIVIL MARRIAGE ACT

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice has been misleading Canadians for months saying that the same sex marriage bill protects religious freedom.

However yesterday the minister finally admitted that he cannot guarantee protection of religious rights because many of the issues fall within provincial jurisdiction.

Why will the minister not put the bill on hold until he can determine a comprehensive legislative approach with the provinces in order to ensure that all the freedoms of Canadians are protected?

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is the comments by the member opposite that are misleading Canadians.

Our legislation is in accordance with the two foundational principles set forth by the Supreme Court and eight jurisdictions of the country with respect to the protection of equality rights and the protection of religious freedom. We still say that the bill is sound in principle.

We are open to any amendments for further certainty but the foundational principles are there and they protect both equality and religious freedom.

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the minister told the press that he could not protect those religious freedoms. Now he is telling Canadians that he can. He cannot get his story straight.

Oral Questions

In fact, what witnesses at the committee told Parliament was that significant legal protections must be added to the bill. The minister's vague assurances, like those he gave in the House today, are simply not acceptable.

With so many concerns before us, why is the minister rushing the bill through Parliament? Why does he not simply stop and think before he acts?

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite should think before he speaks.

With respect to the question of religious protection, I said that we would not trench on provincial jurisdiction. I said that we were open to any amendments that are compatible with the principles of the bill, that are sound and that are compatible with our federal jurisdiction.

With respect to rushing the bill through, the committee, along with its predecessor committee, has already heard from over 500 witnesses, has received 300 written submissions, and court decisions in hearings in eight provinces and territories, the Supreme Court of Canada and second reading.

The bill has been studied to death and we are still prepared—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL AID

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Stephen Lewis, the former Canadian ambassador to the United Nations, is baffled by the government's resistance to developing a concrete plan to meet the UN target. Regardless of what the Prime Minister may say, Canada's international aid has dropped from 0.44% of GDP in 1993 to 0.30% of GDP in 2005.

Instead of showing off with his friend Bono, will the Prime Minister recognize that, rather than increasing, Canada's international aid has in fact decreased, as compared to 1993?

[English]

Hon. Aileen Carroll (Minister of International Cooperation, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has committed to an annual 8% increase that will set us on a path that triples the volume of our aid from the year 2001 to 2015. To put this in perspective, I think we need to understand that 8% is roughly twice the rate of growth of government revenue and virtually no other part of government is growing this quickly.

Our commitment is very clear. We understand exactly what we are doing and where we are going. What I am confused about is that the hon. member is a member of a party that will not even support Bill C-48 with half a billion dollars coming to my aid projects.

• (1455)

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Lewis feels that Canada is not doing enough. An increase between 12% and 15% a year until 2015 would be necessary to meet the UN's 0.7% target. But the latest budget only

provides for an 8% increase, which means that the UN target will not be met until 2035.

Will the minister recognize that, at best, even with the funding recently added, the UN target is not likely to be reached until 2028?

Hon. Aileen Carroll (Minister of International Cooperation, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is very important, for example, that our international aid budget increased by 30% last year. That is one example.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a drug trafficking ring has been uncovered in the Eastern Townships. At the same time, the Liberals are seeking to decriminalize cannabis and open the door to organized crime. In addition, this government keeps reducing the budgets for the RCMP and border security.

When will this government recognize that withdrawing RCMP officers is a threat to our safety and encourages drug traffickers?

[English]

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a great example of the success of the reorganization of the RCMP. The RCMP was reorganized in the province of Quebec to work more closely with the sûreté and more effectively with the sûreté on national law enforcement issues. Clearly, drug interdiction is one of those.

This speaks to the kind of partnership among the RCMP, the Sûreté du Québec and the Drug Enforcement Administration. It is a wonderful example of how law enforcement agencies should work together to keep people safe.

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a wonderful example of how easy it is to get grass across the border and how hard it is to get cows across the border with the government in charge of things.

As a result of this drug bust, weapons, hundreds of thousands of dollars and even a helicopter were recovered, all to be used in the export of drugs. This activity heightens the fears of law-abiding Canadians.

Organized crime continues to grow. Rather than sit on organized crime, the government continues to sit on its hands.

When will the minister recognize the importance of a stronger Canadian border and the role it plays in combating organized crime?

Oral Questions

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since September 11, 2001, the government has recognized the importance of that border. We do not want the border to be a barrier to low risk goods and people, but we do want to work together with our American counterparts. This is why we have put in some \$9.5 billion since that tragic day on September 11, to ensure that we are able to work in partnership so the border is not a barrier and we are able to identify those who may be a risk and those goods which may be a risk.

* * *

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

The third session of the intergovernmental experts meeting to negotiate the UNESCO convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expression wrapped up in Paris on June 3.

Could the minister explain to the House what progress has been made on this important issue?

Hon. Liza Frulla (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Minister responsible for Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we achieved a real breakthrough for Canada on June 3. We gathered the support of 127 countries. The European Union as well as Russia, India and China have been supportive of the draft text.

[*Translation*]

The text says three things. First, it recognizes the dual nature—that is, economic and social—of cultural industries. Second, it allows states to implement cultural policies. Third, the convention has to be on equal footing with other international agreements.

* * *

[*English*]**CHINA**

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to its own documents the government gave at least \$33 million to the government of China last year. Sadly, this came as a surprise to the minister when she was shown the information. What is more shocking for Canadians are reports that a Chinese spy network has been operating in Canada. This news comes several months after CSIS warned of this activity, yet the federal government has done nothing about it.

Has the government discussed the issue with Chinese officials?

● (1500)

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we take those who would do harm to this country, either here or abroad, very seriously. I want to reassure everyone in the House that we do everything we can to ensure that we deal with those who might do harm or involve themselves in economic or industrial espionage.

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians want to know when the government will start standing up for human rights. It has been 16 years since the Tiananmen

Square massacre and human rights in China have yet to improve. China has the world's largest army, the world's second largest economy, nuclear weapons, and 700 missiles pointed at Taiwan.

When will the minister stop giving money to the undemocratic and repressive communist Chinese government?

Hon. Aileen Carroll (Minister of International Cooperation, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will answer really slowly, so the hon. member and new critic can understand. I explained to her predecessor and I explained it very well, so that most people in the House and in committee were able to understand. The government does not give money directly to the government of China.

Instead, we work with a valuable partner such as the Canadian Bar Association in building governance and in building the very basis of human rights that the member wants us to do. In that regard, we are building just the rules-based society that we need with a very important partner like China.

* * *

[*Translation*]**NATIONAL DEFENCE**

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in November, the Minister of National Defence announced that he would be carrying out a pilot project in July 2005 to recover shells and other projectiles from Lac St-Pierre, which has been designated a world biosphere reserve by UNESCO. These shells pose an environmental threat and are an obstacle to tourism development at the reserve.

Is the Minister of National Defence, who made this commitment last November to the people of my region, going to keep his promise and have these shells removed immediately?

[*English*]

Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Department of National Defence is actually very involved in this issue. There were technical problems and safety issues with respect to the divers that were responsible for doing this. We opted not to put a diver's life in danger, but when it becomes safe to go and take out these shells, we will do it.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government recently announced the allocation of \$800 million for public transit, money that will help reduce smog and congestion in communities across Canada. This good news must be highlighted today during Canadian Environment Week.

Can the Minister of State for Infrastructure and Communities please tell the House about the importance of this investment in public transit?

Speaker's Ruling

Hon. John Godfrey (Minister of State (Infrastructure and Communities), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, David Suzuki, one of Canada's leading environmentalists, had this to say about our investments in Canada's communities:

Over the last few months, the federal government has produced a budget that includes some truly innovative measures and released its long-awaited climate change plan.

That is what our public transit investments are doing. That is why our gas tax funding is crucial to environmentally sustainable municipal infrastructure, but all this funding is at risk if we do not pass the budget. I would say, as Canada's big city mayors have said in a unanimous resolution, Parliament needs to put people before politics and get the budget passed.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my colleague, the official opposition House leader, I would like to ask the hon. government House leader the Thursday question. Could he project for us the business of the government for the balance of this week and the week ahead?

Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon we will continue with the opposition motion. I wish to designate Tuesday, June 14 as an allotted day, which means that the main estimates shall be dealt with that day.

Tomorrow we will begin report stage of Bill C-43, which is the first budget bill. This bill will be our priority until it is disposed of. When Bill C-48, the second budget bill, is reported from committee, it, too, shall be given our top priority.

There are discussions among the parties concerning the early disposal of Bill C-2, the child protection legislation; Bill C-53, the bill respecting proceeds of crime; and possibly Bill C-56, the Labrador-Inuit legislation.

The other pieces of legislation that we can anticipate debating in the next week are: Bill C-26, the border services bill; Bill S-18, the census legislation; Bill C-25, RADARSAT; Bill C-52, the Fisheries Act amendment; Bill C-28, the Food and Drugs Act amendments; Bill C-37, the do not call legislation; Bill C-44, the transport legislation; and Bill C-47, the Air Canada bill.

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● (1505)

PRIVILEGE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS—
SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised on May 31 by the hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington concerning comments made by the hon. member for Ottawa Centre during question period that day about the proceedings of an in camera meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

I would like to thank the hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington for having raised this issue. I would also like

to thank the hon. member for Ottawa Centre, the hon. House leader of the official opposition and the hon. House leader for the New Democratic Party for their contributions to the discussion.

In raising his question of privilege, the hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington charged that in a preamble to a question posed to the chair of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, the hon. member for Ottawa Centre had referred to events that had taken place in an in camera meeting of the committee held earlier that day.

The hon. member argued that because the meeting had been held in camera, he was unable to comment on the facts as presented by the hon. member for Ottawa Centre, which he found to be selective. He went on to claim that the divulging of the committee's proceedings violated the privileges of the entire committee and particularly the members of the Conservative Party.

[Translation]

In response to the hon. member's charge, the hon. member for Ottawa Centre stated that his comments were factually accurate and were consistent with the rules of the House.

[English]

In his intervention, the hon. House leader of the official opposition supported the arguments of the hon. member who had raised the matter.

The hon. House leader for the New Democratic Party contributed to the discussion by pointing out that the hon. member for Ottawa Centre had only spoken to the processes and workings of the committee. He had not identified specific members, nor had he divulged the particulars of the debate or the substance of the motion being considered by the committee.

Following these interventions, I indicated to the House that I had found the question to be in order in that it dealt with future meetings of the committee. I undertook, however, to review the remarks made by the hon. member in his preamble and to return to the House.

As all hon. members know, questions seeking information about the schedule and the agenda of committees may be directed at chairs of committees during question period. This is clearly stated in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* at page 429. I reviewed the *Debates* for that day and it is clear that the hon. member for Ottawa Centre asked a question about the scheduling of the next meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

[Translation]

Given that questions of privilege have been raised on this kind of matter recently, I believe it would be helpful to all hon. members if I reviewed the procedures pertaining to the confidentiality of in camera committee meetings.

[English]

As mentioned on page 838 of Marleau and Montpetit, the Speaker has ruled in the past that divulging any part of the proceedings of an in camera committee meeting constitutes a prima facie matter of privilege. This statement is based on a ruling given by Speaker Fraser on May 14, 1987 at pages 6108-11 of the *Debates*.

The case in question involved the disclosure by a member of the results of a recorded vote held in an in camera meeting of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. The matter was found *prima facie* and referred to the Standing Committee on Elections, Privileges and Procedure.

In paragraph 8 of its seventh report on the question of privilege presented on December 18, 1987, the committee stated the following about in camera meetings:

An in camera meeting is one which occurs behind closed doors. It is a confidential meeting in that the public is excluded. Your committee firmly believes in the value and importance of in camera meetings to committees of the House. While committees often meet in public session, there is no doubt they must retain the option of meeting behind closed doors, deliberately excluding the public and the media. In camera meetings are often essential in the preparation of committee reports and in the hearing of sensitive testimony. This practice allows committees a measure of independence and enhances the collegiality of members, something which is necessary to effective committee work. The success of in camera meetings depends upon their privacy; their confidentiality must be respected by all involved. Without that respect, the work of all committees would be seriously imperilled to the detriment of the House and all Members.

The report goes on to state, in part, in paragraph 10:

When a committee chooses to meet in camera, all matters are confidential. Any departure from strict confidentiality should be by explicit committee decision which should deal with what matters may be published, in which form and by whom... Equally, committees should give careful consideration to the matters that should be dealt with in camera and matters that should be discussed in public.

If the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs so wishes, it may consider whether this exchange in question period on May 31, 2005 constitutes a breach of its confidentiality and if so, report to the House. As I have clearly indicated in previous rulings, there has always been considerable reluctance on the part of the Chair to intervene in any matter which the committee itself ought to decide.

• (1510)

[Translation]

I thank all hon. members for their interventions on this very important matter.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—STRATEGY TO HELP OLDER WORKERS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while I was getting warmed up in my speech before question period, I was talking about the fact that we seemed to have two competing dichotomous approaches the issue of income for people who were no longer able to earn their income, either because of retirement, or layoffs in their plant, or illness or whatever.

The dichotomy is in the sense that to some degree we want these people to fund their own income for the when they retire and they need income aside from their earnings. On the other hand we have these public programs.

Supply

The problem I recognize with them is they fight with each other. It seems that individuals have set aside savings for the time when they may unexpectedly lose their jobs and are disadvantaged. If they have too much income from their savings and investments, they are disqualified from benefits under unemployment insurance. I still call it unemployment insurance. I know the new term is employment insurance. The fact is it does not insure employment. It is a program designed to help people when they are unemployed. Even though that change was made a number of years ago, it is unemployment insurance.

In terms of the motion before us today, we need to make some fundamental changes to the whole approach that the government uses. We need to reconcile these two different tracks on which people can provide for themselves with the aid of a government program for that time when their income ceases from employment.

Personally, I would like to see a system whereby, in unemployment insurance collections, there is not a disincentive to taking a part time or a low paying job. I know a number of people who cannot make ends meet on the benefits they receive. If they were to go and get a low paying, part time job, those additional earnings would be clawed back at the rate of about 100%. In other words, if people earn an extra \$100, they lose \$100 of benefits. That is a total disincentive for people and it is a discouraging one.

It is unfortunate when individuals who would like to help themselves are discouraged from doing so because of the administrative details of the program in which they are involved.

The motion put forward by the Bloc today calls specifically for an extension of benefits for people, if they are in the later years of their earning career, who lose their jobs due to plants or factory closures or whatever. There is no doubt in my mind that there is a substantial need to recognize and address that problem, which is a large. Many people find themselves in that position.

When they are at that age, it is very difficult to go to another business or another manufacturing place. Even if jobs are available, it is difficult to persuade them at that stage in their life to embark on a program of training and integration into the new business. Many of them end up in real dire straights.

The more we can do to change our public policies with respect to our retirement and EI programs and the more we can do in policies to address those issues and give some substantial solutions to people who find themselves in these difficult places, the better job we would be doing for our constituents.

While this addresses only a part of the problem and while I would like to see much more done, I believe, based on my present analysis of it, the motion goes in the right direction. My preliminary estimate is that I am inclined to vote for the motion when it comes to a vote.

I thank the House for the opportunity of being able to address this issue on behalf of many Canadians in this situation.

• (1515)

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will share my time with the hon. member for Drummond.

Supply

It is a pleasure for me to participate today in the debate on this very important issue. For the benefit of people who are following our debate, I would like to read the Bloc's motion:

That, in the opinion of the House, due to the increasing number of factory closures associated with globalization, the government should establish a strategy to help older workers who lose their jobs, a strategy that should include income support measures.

Since POWA was shut down in 1997, there has been no income support program specifically developed for older workers who are victims of a mass layoff or business closure.

The numbers are revealing in this regard. Workers aged 55 and over represent only 3.5% of cases in regular skills development programs, that is to say, in training programs.

We all know that the POWA has saved families. To get a good idea of what can happen to a 55 year old or older worker who loses his job, we only have to look at many Quebec companies and at any of the Quebec ridings. Lately, because of globalization and all the changes happening in the markets, plants and companies have closed and will never reopen again. They were, for the most part, specialized in sectors that have now been taken over by other countries, like China and others.

The workers who were specialized in these areas did not necessarily have a high level of education. These people learned a trade and specialized in certain areas. They learned on the job. They worked for 30 or 35 years for the same company and now, at age 55, they have lost their jobs and have nothing in front of them. They never finished grade 12 and we all know that today in Quebec, if you do not have a grade 12 diploma, it is too bad, but you cannot find a job anywhere.

These people who had a good salary had managed to acquire assets that they deserved, a house, a car, etc. They found themselves out of a job and lost almost everything they owned. When they stopped drawing EI benefits, they were not automatically allowed to collect social assistance.

These are not people who can easily retrain. They can not necessarily go back to school. Most of them did not even have any high school education. Just imagine those 55 year olds going back to first year high school. It is hard to imagine.

The POWA program that existed before allowed these people to reach retirement without having to give up their assets or their pride. We spend our lives accumulating and collecting things, trying to live better and suddenly, a misfortune like this occurs and we lose everything. It is difficult to go through. Often, these are people who live in the regions. It is even more difficult to find a new job in the regions. This program would allow people to make the transition.

The Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities tabled a unanimous report in this House that included 28 recommendations. Among these recommendations, the committee called for an improved POWA. None of the 28 recommendations was implemented. They were completely ignored. Today, there is a \$47 billion surplus in the EI fund.

● (1520)

We calculated the cost of this program and it is not exorbitant. This program could cost roughly \$500 million. What is \$500 million when there is a \$47 billion surplus? We would be helping people who lost their job through no fault of their own, and who are in a difficult situation, make the transition until their retirement. We are not asking for the moon or for charity. We are asking that the money paid into EI be reinvested or returned to the workers, as we have always said. Currently, that is not the case.

We are, however, trying to make progress. I find this motion quite interesting. I hope that my colleagues opposite will have a good word to say about our older workers.

You have probably heard of the company in my riding that used to make the skates for all the hockey players on the Montreal Canadiens team—it is true they need specialized skates. This company closed its doors, but it used to be able to make a pair of specialized skates in 24 hours. A hockey player could order and receive a pair of skates within 24 hours. This company had more than 2,000 employees barely seven years ago. Over the years, because of globalization, these jobs were lost to China.

Some people who worked in this company learned their jobs there. They eventually earned wages that were quite attractive and advantageous. The layoffs occurred 500 at a time. Those are quite large layoffs.

It is less a problem for younger people because they can take advantage of programs or training to find another job, even if it is hard. But it is much more difficult for people of a certain age to get in somewhere.

With an improved POWA, it would be nice to see these people continuing to live well. They contributed to the economic growth of Quebec and paid taxes for years. In view of the surplus that the government has, it would be shameful not to help them get over this transition period. I think, though, that there is a desire here to change things. I sincerely hope so.

The company that I was talking about closed its doors. It was still possible to help the youngest people, but some of the older people suffered terribly, even so far as losing their houses. That is not what we want. After working all our lives, we do not want to lose everything and start receiving social assistance, simply because we lost our job and cannot find another. I hope that the government will again adopt a measure like this to enable people to get through this difficult situation.

I have another example. There were two companies in my riding that specialized in bathing suits. The labour force consisted mostly of women who were specialized seamstresses. Here too, production was transferred abroad and these jobs were lost. Many of them were single women, who had raised their children on their own and have now fallen on hard times. Solutions have to be found to help them. I hope that the government will be receptive and that this motion will pass, in order to create a program.

Supply

We must not forget all the other measures. This is important because all areas of Quebec are now affected by the massive closure of industries that used to support entire regions. One need only think of what is happening in Huntingdon. That is not what we want. They must be given a chance to find a way out.

● (1525)

I sincerely hope that we will have an improved POWA. I hope that all the hon. members here in this House agree and vote in favour of this motion. That would be a fine gesture, but one that is owed to them because they have paid taxes for so many years—a gesture for older people who are going through difficult times.

[*English*]

Hon. Raymond Simard: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Discussions have taken place between all parties and I believe you would find consent for a motion that Bill C-2, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (protection of children and other vulnerable persons) and the Canada Evidence Act, be deemed to have been concurred in at the report stage, read a second time, read a third time and passed on division; and, that Bill C-53, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (proceeds of crime) and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, and to make consequential amendments to another act, be deemed to have been read a second time, referred to a committee and reported to the House without amendment, concurred in at report stage, read a third time and passed.

The Speaker: Does the hon. parliamentary secretary have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Social Development (Social Economy), Lib.): I listened carefully to the remarks of the Bloc Québécois member, and I share many of her views, but I would like to point out something she may not be aware of.

It is true that the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, of which I am a member, tabled a unanimous report. But when the hon. member says that this government did not take any action, I would like to remind her that Liberal members took part in the preparation of this report. It has been accepted by the government, and we made five amendments to the employment insurance legislation. Members opposite keep forgetting that.

The Bloc Québécois thinks we never make enough changes, and it never gives us credit for the changes that are made. We criticize, but we also take action, as any government should. Improvements to EI were made concerning the 14 weeks for those who are eligible. We changed the regional limits to be able to enhance benefits for seasonal workers.

We are respectful of Quebec and the provinces in terms of their jurisdiction over manpower and training. We provided over \$600 million to ensure workers have the money they need for training. When the PQ separatist government was in power, why did it do nothing for older workers?

● (1530)

Ms. Monique Guay: When criticisms are made in this House, the word “separatist” often comes up. My colleague will have to get used to criticisms, because it is a fact that they have a \$47 billion surplus in the employment insurance fund.

The measures in the budget are trifling, put there to shut people up. It will not work. It is not enough. They cannot even look at the 28 recommendations and try to find solutions. They operate on a case by case basis and they do so because we prod them so much that they have no choice but to act. They wait till they have their backs to the wall and then they react.

Do not tell me that this is how to run things. We do not need any lessons from them. We will stay on their case, because the \$47 billion they stole from the unemployed must be returned. This program is important, it is necessary. It is urgent that it be reinstated and it is their responsibility to put the necessary funds into it.

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a brief comment for my colleague and a question.

My riding is primarily a resource dependent riding, fishing, mining and forestry, and we are finding that a number of economies are in transition. Changing the nature of the way the work is being done often lowers the number of people actually required to do the work.

Many people question me as to why it is required that someone is either fired or laid off in some extraordinary measure before some sort of just transition process can take place and the federal funds, to which they have contributed over a number of years of their working lives, is triggered.

They are confused as to why, when sufficient funds are in place, when known transitions are coming and when the industry is shifting, be it mining, forestry or fishing, the government has no procedure in place that would allow workers in those industries to apply for funding so they can transition out of those industries into sunrise industries as opposed to sunset.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay: Mr. Speaker, earlier, I talked about globalization, as did members from all parties.

With globalization and sectoral markets, changes and problems are a given. We must be in a position to find solutions. In Quebec, as everybody knows, when industry changed, we tried to find solutions. We suspected that the textile industry would collapse and we tried to devise transition programs to retrain workers. But that is not enough. We need more help.

Supply

There is a lot of room for improvement in Human Resources Canada and EI. I sympathize with my colleague. I wish the government had a real desire to make serious changes to all aspects of EI so as to really help workers—instead of what it has been doing since 1993. Workers pay taxes and EI premiums but do not get the services they need. I sympathize and have said what I would like to see. I only hope I will be heard.

* * *

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

(Bill C-2. On the Order: Government Orders:)

June 6, 2005—the Minister of Justice—Report stage and second reading of Bill C-2, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (protection of children and other vulnerable persons) and the Canada Evidence Act, as reported (with amendments) from the committee.

Hon. Raymond Simard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Minister responsible for Official Languages and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am assured that discussions have taken place on this issue and that you would find consent for the following motion. I move:

That Bill C-2, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (protection of children and other vulnerable persons) and the Canada Evidence Act, be deemed to have been concurred in at the report stage, read a second time, read a third time and passed on division.

• (1535)

The Speaker: Does the hon. parliamentary secretary have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to, bill concurred in, read the second time, read the third time and passed)

* * *

[Translation]

SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—STRATEGY TO HELP OLDER WORKERS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the Bloc Québécois opposition day motion. This motion is asking that the government establish a special strategy which could include income support measures for older workers who lose their jobs following tragic events like plant closures.

This is not the first time that I rise in this House to call for the reinstatement of a program suited to the needs of older workers who lose their jobs.

Such a program existed between 1988 and 1997, and it gave meaningful results. My colleagues from the Bloc Québécois and I believe it could be successful again, provided the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development approves this funding formula, one that has proven effective in the past.

We are asking that the minister consider the situation of those men and women who lose their jobs just a few years, often less than five years, from retirement, collect EI benefits for a few weeks and end up on welfare.

The program for older worker adjustment, or POWA, that was created in 1988, provided for the payment of benefits to eligible workers between the ages of 55 and 64 who had lost their jobs following massive permanent lay-offs. This program allowed workers to collect benefits over a longer period and bridge the gap until they qualified for their old age pension.

In the past, a number of massive lay-offs, including at Celanese, Denim Swift, Tripap, Fruit of the Loom, Norton, Fonderie Gaspé in Murdochville, etc., have demonstrated that a permanent support program such as POWA is essential for older workers who cannot retrain.

Since the program was abolished, in 1997, no other permanent initiative was implemented to replace it and help workers who have contributed to the employment insurance program all their lives, and who often no longer have the mobility and ability to adjust, in order to quickly find another job.

In my riding, there were many textile plants. I am using the past tense because almost all of them have disappeared. What was a vital part of the industry and of the economy has faded and disappeared.

When an industry is primarily located in Quebec, the federal government drags its feet and the Quebec federal Liberals remain silent. The textile and clothing industry is a case in point. About half of the industry is located in Quebec, where it provides close to 100,000 direct jobs. We are talking about the loss of almost 12,000 jobs over the past 12 years, just for the riding of Drummond, and particularly for the city of Drummondville. This attrition is still going on, yet no measures have been taken to counter these plant closures.

As we know, the textile and clothing industries are going through a crisis. They must adjust to a business environment that has changed drastically in recent times. On December 31, 2004, the agreement on textiles and clothing, which had been in effect since 1995, expired. This means that the borders of Canada and Quebec will now be more open to imports, including those from China, which are experiencing a strong growth. Needless to say, it is the federal government that is responsible for this reopening of our borders.

Celanese Canada had always been one of the largest employers in Drummondville. When it shut down permanently, in March 2000, a total of 5,000 workers had been laid off, over a period of 10 years.

Seven months later, Cavalier Textile stopped production and 97 people lost their jobs.

In December 2003, Denim Swift management announced that it was ceasing its denim production activities in April 2004, putting 600 people out of work.

Supply

● (1540)

In the case of Denim Swift, at the time of the shutdown, the average hourly rate of pay was \$15.30. The employees had spent most of their working life there, specializing to meet the needs of the company. It is all very well to set up adjustment committees, but the fact is that these older workers are often unable to find employment at a comparable salary. This leads to a lowered quality of life, reduced financial capacity, weaker purchasing power and a deterioration of their personal situation. These are a few examples where an aid program, adapted to the situation of workers aged 55 and over, would have been useful.

Without a doubt, age constitutes a unique problem following a job loss because employers are more reluctant to hire older workers. Older workers remain unemployed for much longer periods. In its 2004 monitoring and assessment report, tabled in March 2005, the Canada Employment Insurance Commission indicated that, "Although older workers enjoyed considerable employment growth in 2003-04, it is widely acknowledged that once unemployed, older workers may face challenges becoming re-employed. Older workers are overrepresented among the long-term unemployed, representing 21.3% of this group and only 12.5% of the labour force".

According to the four main labour bodies, "studies have also shown that the older they are, the harder it is for workers to access information. So, a job loss is much more painful experience for older workers than for younger workers, because the skills of older workers, who have not had access to training, are increasingly out of sync with the skills required by the current labour market".

Despite this finding, the Liberal government has continued to turn a deaf ear to our demands, even if the current Minister of Foreign Affairs and member for Papineau had told me that this cancellation was temporary and that his government would respond with a new and improved POWA. This promise was made in 1997, during the election campaign.

Must I remind the House that the Liberal Party has already made this promise when the current Prime Minister, during the last election campaign, promised to re-establish POWA, a commitment he has yet to honour.

All this government has done is set up pilot projects wherever it wants, the number of which are far from meeting the need. There will never be enough: it is unacceptable for the federal government not to help older workers, when they are in such dire straits. It is even worse since we know that the EI fund has accumulated a surplus of over \$47 billion, thanks to premiums paid.

I have to smile when the other side calls it a virtual fund. But, for people paying EI premiums, that money comes out of their pay cheques. It is not virtual.

Stakeholders in Quebec are in favour of a new POWA: the workers, the unions, the members of the National Assembly. Let us keep in mind that here in this very House of Commons, last December, the majority of members supported a Bloc Québécois motion calling for a new POWA for older workers affected by the textile crisis. Those groups even came here to demand an assistance program.

What is the government waiting for before taking action and creating a real program like the one it abolished in 1997?

It is essential to have a bridge between EI and pension for those older workers who have trouble finding something new. A retraining program and assistance with retraining does not work. When someone aged 58 has been working for 40 years in a factory, he does not have much of an academic background.

● (1545)

They want these workers to go back to school and learn a new trade. Let us be logical: that is impossible at 58. What is more, employers are hesitant to hire older workers, and the only way they can manage is to go on welfare. That is indecent.

This morning, the minister indicated that she would be voting in favour of the Bloc Québécois motion. I would like, however, to be sure that what she has in mind, the program she will be putting in place, will be a source of income for these people. It must not be a pilot project, nor a training or retraining program. It must be a source of income to fill the gap between the time they lose their jobs and the time they can start receiving pension payments.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Social Development (Social Economy), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member from the Bloc that I too voted in favour of the motion on POWA. I have worked a long time on this program, which I support. This is why we are voting in favour of today's motion.

Regarding the 28 recommendations tabled in December, I would remind her, as I did her colleague who spoke before her, that she is neglecting to say that the Liberals tabled a report containing eight recommendations, and these recommendations were identical to those in the committee's report. The government adopted these eight recommendations, which concern financing the EI fund, setting the rate for benefits and independence.

I would like to put the following question to her. Does she agree with voting in favour of the government's budget, because it contains measures whereby the principle of the independence of the employment insurance fund be adopted by this House?

Ms. Pauline Picard: Mr. Speaker, the motion we are debating here concerns older workers. I will reread it so my colleague will understand:

That, in the opinion of the House, due to the increasing number of factory closures associated with globalization, the government should establish a strategy to help older workers who lose their jobs, a strategy that should include income support measures.

Supply

In the recommendations made by the committee the hon. member sits on, there was one to support older workers facing permanent plant closures. In the government's proposal, there is no significant measure to provide income support to help these older workers maintain a decent living between the time they lose their permanent job—after getting EI benefits—and the time they begin getting a government pension, which allows them to continue to enjoy a better quality of life.

That is what the Program for Older Worker Adjustment, the former POWA, did. It provided a monthly income to everyone who had lost their job. It saved them from having to beg for social assistance after they received EI benefits.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know how you would feel if you were faced with a tragedy such as losing your job after 40 years and being forced to beg for social assistance after having paid for many years an insurance called employment insurance. It has stopped being an insurance in case of unemployment; it is now a windfall for the government which, year after year, steals billions of dollars from the EI fund. This money could be used to create real programs to ensure that people who lose their jobs still receive an income to help them get back on the labour market or look for a new job. Such programs would help our older workers to have a decent quality of life and a respectable income after having worked so hard for so long. While working, one pays taxes that contribute to society as a whole.

I would like the hon. member to take this into account while she rereads the motion before her.

I know the minister supports the passing of this motion. As parliamentary secretary, she could do more to raise the minister's awareness. What we want are real income support measures, similar to the Régie des rentes du Québec, because workers who lose their jobs are in a precarious situation. We must help them to hold on until they start receiving their RRQ benefits. That would assure them of a decent quality of life, after a lifetime of contribution to society as a whole.

•(1550)

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Social Development (Social Economy), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will share my time with my colleague, the member for Laval—Les Îles.

Indeed, I read the motion carefully, as opposed to what the member just said. I am very familiar with this issue. She forgot to say that I did support the motion regarding POWA. Several times, since my election, I have expressed my agreement with this idea. The Bloc Québécois is not the only party standing for the interests of workers. There are members on this side of the House who are also part of this. However, members across the floor are not as generous.

[English]

I will be pleased to speak in favour of this motion, as the minister has said, since it addresses the issues of how our government has responded—and those are the key words—and continues to respond to an aging workforce and to the profound economic transformation taking place not only in Canada but also around the world.

As I said earlier, it involves matters that are of great concern to all my colleagues, and on all sides of the House, I would like to say,

especially those living in Quebec, where our population is aging more rapidly than in Canada as a whole and where we have seen a number of high profile layoffs in recent months in the apparel and textile industry.

[Translation]

Please allow me again to say that, as the member for Ahuntsic, a riding with many textile manufacturing and clothing companies, I have often had the opportunity to meet with the entrepreneurs behind these companies. In particular, I have met with the president of the Regroupement des marchands de la rue Chabanel, Mr. Perugini, and with Mr. Leclerc, from the Société de développement et de promotion de l'Innopôle. I do not have any lesson to learn regarding this industry, which I have stood for since 1993 in spite of the critics from the opposition.

I try to learn more about difficulties and obstacles facing these industries. Also, for a long time, I have been working hard, just as my colleague from the other side, to find ways to help these industries and their workers—mostly older people—and to ensure that our government's initiatives help them solve their problems.

[English]

While I am on the topic of the apparel and textile industries and, more specifically, their workers, who for the large part are older workers, let me remind hon. members that on May 2 of this year I announced in Montreal, on behalf of the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, funding of \$5.9 million under the sector council program for four projects by the Textiles Human Resource Council, projects that will help support the promotion of skills development within the textile sector and which aim to improve our country's economic growth and competitiveness in this sector.

This was followed by another announcement again last month, which I made on behalf of the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, of \$3 million for three projects aimed at improving our country's economic growth and competitiveness in the apparel sector.

[Translation]

We must therefore look closely at the various aspects of this motion.

For starters, I support the goal of this motion. I have already said so and I say it again. I personally support it, in view of the fact that there are older workers in my riding of Ahuntsic. I support it along with my colleagues in this House and the government. We are very concerned. It is not only the Bloc that is concerned. In addition, we are doing things and taking active steps.

I would also like to assure the hon. member that the Government of Canada is working hard to provide all workers, including older workers, with the assistance they need to meet the challenges they face on our rapidly changing job markets.

Supply

•(1555)

[*English*]

Part of this involves fostering a strong economy and job creation, since the best social program is a job. I believe the hon. member from the Bloc who introduced the motion in fact said that he does not want to just give cheques to people. He wants seniors to feel that they are part of and can still contribute to the workforce.

We have heard two sides of the coin in the discussions in the House today. One member said to just give them some money so they can get up to their pensions, and another speaker said that we should give them a cheque but that at the same time they should be working. We have been working on both ends, but more in terms of making sure that, as I said earlier, the best social program is a job. I think our record speaks for itself in terms of the type of job creation we have done.

The most recent EI monitoring and assessment report suggests that we have been enjoying considerable success in this area during the last year. Almost 289,000 new jobs were added, of which 82,000 were full time.

Allow me to also give the House a broad figure before I go on. Between 1993 and 2004, overall employment growth in the country was almost 3.2 million jobs. During the same period, employment growth for older workers, those aged 55 years and over, totalled about 868,000 jobs, which represents a 71% increase over the period. We are dealing with annual averages here. I want to repeat that: over 55, 868,000 jobs, which represents a 71% increase over the period. The figures I just quoted were from 1993 to the present, which further goes to show how devoted the government is to helping Canadian workers in general, but especially our older workers, find employment and stay employed.

While employment growth is strong overall, some workers, including older workers, do face special challenges. We accept that, which is why we have developed a wide array of programs aimed at helping such workers respond to labour market changes.

One way involves using the EI temporary income supports to help workers make ends meet while they look for another job. For example, last year \$13.8 billion was paid out in EI benefits, of which \$3.8 billion went to workers 45 years of age and older.

Just providing income supports is not enough, as everyone has said, and as the mover of this motion said in his opening remarks. Many older workers have excellent skills that are invaluable to employers in our increasingly demanding knowledge based economy. We need to find ways of encouraging older workers to stay in the workforce so they can continue to contribute.

[*Translation*]

Active, not passive, employment insurance measures are another way of helping workers find opportunities for developing the skills they need to be able to return to work and continue working. Once again, we have had a lot of success thanks to these measures.

Last year, nearly 600,000 Canadians participated in these programs, and of this number, 160,000 were over 45 years of age. These programs helped them develop their skills and get counselling,

as well as the assistance they needed to write their resumé and do their job searches to find new employment.

I could add that these programs are designed to be very flexible and to be carried out in various ways depending on local needs and circumstances.

In Quebec, for example, these programs are delivered through Emploi-Québec in accordance with the Canada-Quebec labour market agreement. Under this agreement, the Government of Canada provides nearly \$600 million a year to the Government of Quebec. The question that arises, which I asked earlier, is the following: When the separatist government was in power, why did it not introduce the same measures in its area of jurisdiction to help older workers? I have not received an answer.

•(1600)

[*English*]

Helping older workers is not something that either EI or the Government of Canada can do alone. As I said earlier, everyone needs to get involved if we are to succeed. A number of different approaches are required.

That is why we are working closely with our provincial and territorial partners on other projects, such as older workers pilot project initiatives, aimed at exploring new ways of helping older workers find new jobs and stay employed.

Between 1995 and 2005, the Government of Canada invested \$50 million in this work, of which almost \$21.5 million went into some 74 projects aimed at helping Quebec workers, yes, 74 projects.

[*Translation*]

Last December, I also announced funding in Montreal on behalf of the Government of Canada—as I did as well in Ottawa—for Filière Employabilité Inc. in Ahuntsic and the Association Midi-Quarante Inc. in Laval. This funding will be used to complete two pilot projects under the Canada-Quebec agreement on pilot projects for older workers.

[*English*]

We recently announced another \$5 million in which we extend the life of the initiative to May 2006, not this year but 2006, so that we and our provincial and territorial partners can continue to explore new ways of helping older workers identify key lessons that can be used to develop new policies and programs in support of older workers.

The important thing here is the collaboration between the federal and provincial governments. I know that my time is running out, but I would like to say that we will continue to improve. We are evaluating those programs. Once the evaluations are done, I am sure that we are going to have a very good program for older unemployed workers.

Supply

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first, I want to thank the member for Ahuntsic for her presentation. It sheds light on the current federal government policies in terms of continuity. What concerns us a great deal is that certain facts are not recognized.

Actually, one of the facts that is not recognized is that 28 recommendations were made by the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, on which I sit with my colleague.

My colleague argues, if I have understood correctly the statement she made a while ago, that the government has taken into account eight of these recommendations. In fact, we received the reply to this committee's report two weeks ago and none of the recommendations were accepted by the government. So I have trouble accepting this argument today.

Some partial solutions may have been announced in February. However, that has nothing to do with the recommendations. That is why, in that regard, I would like the member to explain the statement she made.

Second, regarding the measures that were introduced—I believe it was in February—she mentioned an amount of \$600 million, whereas the government has always maintained it was around \$300 million. We believe the actual amount is less. However, today, we are being told that it is \$600 million, which has nothing to do with what was announced.

Third, my question has to do with Quebec's policies. Can the parliamentary secretary explain something to me? In other circumstances, I could easily have called her Madam Minister. I have trouble understanding her remarks, namely why the Quebec government has not implemented a similar program. Are we to understand that she is willing to do what is needed to transfer to Quebec the amounts of money the federal government has already received and for which it has not assumed its responsibilities.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Mr. Speaker, I think there are several questions in the member's comments. It is true he and I are on the same committee. I was somewhat surprised to learn that the member knew the response to the report, even though the government has not yet tabled it. However, we may be able to deal with that issue again since, as the hon. member well knows, the minister will come before the committee next Tuesday. We will then have an opportunity to ask her questions.

I would like to come back to what I was saying about the 28 recommendations which were tabled. As a matter of fact, there may be two reports because, as members will recall, there was a report by the Liberal caucus. There also is the report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

As a matter of fact, eight of the recommendations were tabled on December 16, 2004, before the other report. We probably are talking about two different reports. Eight recommendations dealt with employment insurance and governance. Therefore, it was in the budget and this is the reason why I have asked the question regarding the budget that is now before the House and which the

Bloc opposes. There nevertheless has been a change regarding the chief actuary, who will be responsible for setting the premium rates to be paid by workers and employers.

That being said, I had an opportunity to discuss the implementation of such a program with representatives of the Government of Quebec. A part of the funds transferred to Quebec—I have already mentioned an amount of \$600,000—can be used to implement a program for older workers. Finally, for workers in the textile and apparel industry, the minister supports the idea and has already taken steps to create a program to help them.

• (1605)

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Ahuntsic for kindly dividing her speaking time with me, and also to thank my hon. colleague, the member for Chambly—Borduas, with whom I have had many hours of discussion on the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

I can assure the House that the Government of Canada is acutely aware of our changing labour market and the consequences of factory closures for Canadian workers, older workers in particular. These closures are the result of a multitude of factors: globalization, international competition, demographic change. In Quebec in particular we have been hit hard by all those factors. The most affected people in a factory are, of course, the older workers, who may be getting to the end of their working lives, and find it difficult to adapt and to find new jobs.

We are therefore highly conscious of the impact of these changes for vulnerable groups. I would like to continue where my colleague from Ahuntsic left off and tell you about the number and quality of programs our government has put in place to meet these needs.

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, working in partnership with the provinces and territories, has the tools ready to respond to these workers' needs.

The first tool available to these Canadians is temporary income support and assistance under the employment insurance program. These EI benefits, funded under Part I of the Employment Insurance Act, are designed especially to help insured Canadians, people who have made contributions and are temporarily unemployed and seeking to re-enter the workforce.

Last year, the Human Resources and Skills Development employment insurance program provided over \$9 billion in income benefits to unemployed Canadians to assist them through this transition period. Of that amount, workers aged 55 or older last year received \$1.2 billion in EI regular benefits.

This temporary support program is specifically designed to respond to changes in labour markets, local markets in particular. For example, when regional unemployment rates change, we adjust entrance requirements accordingly, as well as the length of time that workers are entitled to receive benefits, an extremely complicated process.

When I first came to this House and I worked as parliamentary secretary to the former Minister of Human Resources Development, as was the title at the time, I understood to what extent the Government of Canada took into account in its calculations the conditions specific to each region, specifically and individually, before setting the rate.

The second tool is a full array of active employment measures to assist unemployed workers of all ages. The Government of Canada worked in partnership with provinces and territories to deliver more than \$2 billion in active measures last year alone.

Under these measures, unemployed workers can receive up to three years of training if they require new skills in order to find new and lasting employment. They can also receive income support for up to one year—or longer if they have a disability—while they start their own business.

There are also programs for people who simply need new or additional work experience. Participants in all of these programs receive the income support they need to ensure they are able to participate.

Moreover, EI active measures fund employment services right across the country to assist unemployed individuals with employment counselling and assessment, and job search skills.

Last year, almost 600,000 unemployed workers in Canada, including 160,000 people aged 45 or over, participated in one of these programs.

● (1610)

Of course, we recognize that some older workers who have been laid off experience special difficulties in their search for new work. I said so at the beginning of my remarks. Some lack the skills needed for many of today's jobs, especially those that cannot easily be transferred to the kinds of jobs available in our knowledge based economy.

We also know that many older workers can and want to work longer, much longer.

This is why the Government of Canada has been working in close collaboration with the provinces and territories, including Quebec, my home province, to test new approaches.

Between 1999 and 2005, we invested \$50 million in the Older Workers Pilot Projects initiative. This initiative was recently extended until May 2006 and enriched by \$5 million. It will also enable us to identify key lessons that can be used to develop future programs. To date, this initiative has supported almost 130 pilot projects across the country.

In addition, the Government of Canada's workplace skills strategy aims to assist Canadians already in the workplace, including older workers, to upgrade their existing skills and acquire new ones.

Supply

In the 2005 budget, the government invested \$125 million over three years to support the strategy to meet three objectives: strengthening apprenticeship systems in Canada; testing new skills development programs that are demand-driven and aimed at developing the skills of employed people; and fostering dialogue on workplace skills issues through the workplace partners panel composed of business, labour and training leaders.

Above all, the workplace skills strategy is a collaborative effort. This is why the Government of Canada is working with business, unions, learning institutions, the provinces and territories and sector councils to develop this strategy.

To conclude, I can assure the hon. members that the Government of Canada will continue to work closely with its partners to develop joint strategies to improve the productivity of workers and their inclusion in the labour market.

I cited these programs not to show that all is well, everything is done, we can stop there and workers will have no more problems. On the contrary, it was to show that the Government of Canada is committed to helping unemployed workers, particularly older workers. We intend to continue. The programs we will establish will be the extension of existing programs, which have already had an impact on our economy.

For example, the statistics demonstrate that we are indeed on our way to achieving the goal of reducing unemployment. The current unemployment rate for workers aged 45 and over is 5.4%, considerably below the national overall unemployment rate of 6%. For workers aged 55 to 64, the unemployment rate is 5.9%, which is also significantly lower than the national rate.

I would like to thank the member for Chambly—Borduas once again for his motion, which allowed me this opportunity to describe the government's measures for assisting older workers. What we want, and I think everyone in this House wants it, is to help workers who are unemployed, specifically older workers.

● (1615)

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to take this debate in a slightly different direction based upon the motion before us today. I did not hear the hon. member mention it in her discourse. Clearly it was an oversight because there is an aspect of globalization to the motion and to what happens to the elderly workers across the country as their economies shift.

As we live in an increasingly global economy and environment, one thing we would expect the Canadian government to do is protect the interests of Canada as companies merge with or acquire other companies.

Supply

However, through our research and understanding, over the last near on 15 years now there have been over 11,000 acquisitions of Canadian companies from foreign companies and interests. Some of them, like Minmetals, have been completely hidden from Canadian scrutiny. Through all those acquisitions, there has not been one rejection by the federal government. Not one time was the acquisition not seen in the best interest of Canada. This is an extraordinarily good streak of luck, which is impossible to believe.

Could she comment on her government's lack of will or interest to withhold and uphold Canada's interests as we operate in this global economy?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

The facts are there, but I think the interpretation is mistaken. It might be true that there was no action by the Government of Canada. However, attributing the lack of action to a lack of interest is indeed mistaken, if not false. The Government of Canada is interested when foreign companies purchase Canadian companies. Nonetheless, up to now, the government has still not seen fit to intervene, for various reasons, and I will not give any details now.

We should not forget that we are operating in a global context where, in my view, markets unfortunately cannot remain local. They cannot even remain only national markets; they have become international.

We cannot swim against the current or try to stop it; instead, we should try to turn its power to our advantage, to expand our Canadian markets.

[*English*]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I obviously will support the motion. It relates indirectly to the employment insurance fund. When I think of the employment insurance fund, I think of profound Liberal mismanagement, the way the Liberal government has run these massive surpluses and then just expropriated them from the payers of those taxes to general revenues.

It reminds us really of the situation we have where the Liberal government broke the law to give a contract to rent a building from a Liberal senator, which sat empty for 10 months while taxpayers had to pick up the bill. Today we have learned that there is a second building, which the same Liberal senator's company is in the process of acquiring, which will rent to the government, once again in violation of the ethics rules.

I am concerned that this same thing is happening all over again. The government will pay rent to the company of a Liberal senator, in violation of the ethics rules—

● (1620)

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. What relevance does this have to the motion before the House? We know the hon. member's interest in throwing mud, but that is not what we are now discussing.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. parliamentary secretary. At the start of the hon. member's remarks, he did talk about how he

related it. The member will have to wrap up though because we are out of time.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, I am calling on the government to return to sound ethical practices and not to award these kinds of rental contracts to Liberal members of the upper House in violation of the rules.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Speaker, I do not see a question. When we talk about ethical practices in the EI program, it has been very much looked after by all ombudsmen, by everybody from bottom to top. For the last three or four years we have worked very hard to make the EI payments as ethical as we can. I really do not know what he is talking about.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will split my time with my close friend, the member for Richmond—Arthabaska.

It is with great pleasure that I speak to the motion put forward by my colleague, the member for Chambly—Borduas, who has done a tremendous job, as did his predecessors, with regard to employment insurance. I especially remember when the Bloc Québécois, in partnership with Quebec labour organizations, worked to prevent the Axworthy reform.

After reading the motion, I will remind hon. members of when the POWA was canceled in the 1990s and why it should be reinstated. But first, I will read the motion again:

That, in the opinion of the House, due to the increasing number of factory closures associated with globalization, the government should establish a strategy to help older workers who lose their jobs, a strategy that should include income support measures.

That is the motion before us. Let me remind one thing to the hon. member who spoke of the currents of globalization and expansion of markets. Yes, maybe it is a current. As former Premier of Quebec Jacques Parizeau used to say, "globalization is like the tide; you cannot stop it, but you can contain it".

It is statements such as those I have just heard that have led to extremes concerning free trade in recent decades. Perhaps it is time to swing the pendulum in the other direction and to understand that, if we really want globalization to serve all the people—and not simply one class of people or big international corporations—it will require measures such as the program for older worker adjustment.

Thus, if we want globalization to serve the interests of all the people, we must have measures such as POWA and many other measures as well. Let us start with this one.

I remind you that globalization does not guarantee that disparities will be reduced. Currently, while I am speaking in this debate, 1.4 billion workers across the planet earn a salary of less than \$2 a day. This is 50% of all the manpower in the world. Not only are these people being exploited, but this situation allows businesses to practise social dumping on North American and European markets.

We have the right to protect ourselves against that, first by securing the jobs and income of Canadian workers, and also by signing the major conventions of the International Labour Organization. Unfortunately, Canada has not really signed these conventions—only about three out of seven. Thus, it is not in a good position to teach a lesson to China, India, Bangladesh or even the United States, where forced labour is used in contravention of the International Labour Organization conventions.

So, globalization without a regulatory framework will not guarantee that inequalities will be reduced. There is a danger of social dumping. Consequently, we need social protection measures.

Contrary to what the government has been saying since 1993, and to what the Conservatives were saying before it—because we must remember that it is the Conservatives who initiated the employment insurance reform—an opening of markets, an open economy, is not the same as an economy without social measures. This is a myth, a bias promoted by the Liberal Party of Canada, by certain Canadian right wingers and by a few business circles.

On the contrary. According to OECD data, the most open economies have the highest ratio of social spending to GDP. We are talking here about the Netherlands, Norway, Luxembourg, Austria and Denmark. Those countries recognize, unlike what has happened in Canada in the last 15 or 20 years, that when one chooses to open up globally, everyone must bear the risks, not just a few individuals.

In the clothing and textile industries, for example, the clothing and textile workers must not be the only ones to suffer the effects of the 1995 decision to lift quotas in 2005. Canadians and Quebecers must all bear the consequences. We must first give these workers the means to face this new competition coming mainly from businesses employing low wage earners. I mentioned earlier that half of the workforce globally is not even earning \$2 a day. We must therefore give our workers the means to face this competition.

Second, we have to provide to those who will be unfortunate enough to lose their job—especially older workers—some form of economic security. This is not incompatible.

• (1625)

Unfortunately, the government has always considered that workers' economic security was not compatible with productivity and the opening of markets.

This allows me to give a little history on the disappearance of the Program for Older Worker Adjustment.

During my time at the CSN, my colleague for Chambly—Borduas and I had to deal with massive layoffs in the early 1980s, in the iron and steel and mining sectors. On more than one occasion, we used the program which existed at the time, POWA, for occupational training and retraining, for those who could retrain for other jobs, or for income support measures until retirement, for those who, for all sorts of reasons, could not.

I remember, for example, Marine Industries, which laid off many workers and then switched production. We used POWA, at the time, to ensure that the conversion was socially responsible. We did the same thing in the asbestos sector. When the asbestos mines started to close down, we turned to POWA. It was a program which helped us

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face a recession or the opening of a sector subjected to greater competition. This tool was extremely useful to us.

However, in the early nineties, the Conservatives first, and then the Liberals, thought, based on the logic that I explained earlier, that the economic security of workers was incompatible with productivity and the opening of markets. So, they began sabotaging the employment insurance program. Some financial considerations also came into play. The current Prime Minister and then the Minister of Finance wanted to get his hands on some of that money to reduce the debt without having to hold a public debate.

Be that as it may, the government used some of the ideas of the Canadian and Quebec left wing, including unions, which did not want the government to provide only employment insurance, but also active measures for the labour force.

I remember, for example, a book written by Lise Poulin Simon and Diane Bellemare, entitled *"Une politique de plein emploi: pourquoi et comment?"*. That book had been widely discussed in Quebec. At the time, the Conservatives had appropriated this title and contended that it was necessary to reduce employment insurance benefits, because these benefits did not provide jobs to people. Rather, they wanted to invest in training. They did invest in training, but that was not good enough. The fact is that when people lose their jobs, they still need to eat. They need to eat to be able to get job training.

So, the Conservatives started this movement. Later, when the Liberals took office, they continued that reform. Among others, the so-called Axworthy reform resulted in reduced accessibility to employment insurance. They also got rid of POWA while announcing new pilot projects. We have kept coming back to it for a number of years already.

Again, they present this totally false vision that, in order to be competitive, the labour force must be flexible, and in order to be flexible, it must be on its knees and forced to agree to any working conditions. It is in this context that the employment insurance reform was done. The unions fought against it. So did the Bloc Québécois. At the time, I was with the CSN union.

Now, it is very clear that the problems with unemployment are not related to a strong social protection, but to macroeconomic conditions. During the eighties and nineties, the one thing that really affected employment in Quebec and in Canada was the Bank of Canada's monetary policy, whereby interest rates were raised to unprecedented levels, simply to fight inflation. However, this had the effect of triggering recessions.

I would like to draw the members' attention to the following. It is important for people in the government to read these things and maybe clear their heads of these ancient prejudices and myths. In the first 2005 edition of *Policy Analysis*, in other words the most recent, there is an article by Jim Stanford. He is a well known labour market economist. He summarizes the 1980-90 period as follows:

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—the relatively poorer performance of the labour market in Canada during this period was clearly a result of purely negative macroeconomic conditions and not of more interventionist, egalitarian labour market structures and policies. In the same way, the reduction in the disparity between the unemployment rates since 1996 is due to a recovery in macroeconomic conditions in Canada.

• (1630)

I add that because there may be some Liberals who think that the reduction in the unemployment rate is due to the cuts to employment insurance. It is not because they cut employment insurance but because of macroeconomic conditions, including reduced interest rates, that prosperity has finally returned to Canada and Quebec. We are very happy about that.

That being said, there are still some industrial sectors and regions that are weak. Tools are needed to ensure that these regions get through the difficult times and convert to other niches. The motion introduced by the Bloc Québécois and the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas should be the start of a new era in which Canadians will finally understand—I hope people already know this in Quebec—that better working conditions and social protections are the best guarantees that globalization will continue and everyone will benefit. I hope that this is the dawn of a new age, as a popular song from my youth said.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Social Development (Social Economy), Lib.): I am happy to say that, thanks to the economic climate, more jobs have been created. And this economic climate was brought about by the government. When we came to power, the country had a deficit. Obviously, job creation is not possible in a deficit situation. But with a balanced budget and lower interest rates, the proper climate can exist. This was not achieved because someone just yelled. Actions were taken, on this side of the House, by this government, with the help—I must say—of the provincial governments. This is the reason why jobs were created.

My question is more specific. The member may not have been in the House during my speech. I mentioned that \$600 million were transferred. In fact, we do recognize Quebec's jurisdiction over manpower and employment.

Their brothers from the Parti Québécois were in power at the time. They do not like me calling them separatists. When they were in power, no program was created for older workers. Since 1993, we have taken a whole series of actions to help those who have lost their jobs.

As I mentioned in my speech, we have created jobs. The best economic and social program is job creation, and this is what we have done. They have created nothing. Now, they are coming back to demand the same thing. But they must admit that the proper climate exists precisely because, on this side of the House, action was taken to ensure that job creation would occur.

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, we could almost say that jobs were created in spite of the government. I find it surprising sometimes, given the cuts to federal transfers to the provinces. Take the roads. I thought our roads were bad in Quebec, but I went to Nova Scotia recently and the roads were absolutely awful. We cannot have road infrastructure in such bad shape and think we can continue to develop. We must invest in infrastructure.

Year after year, there is a coalition in Quebec for infrastructure investment. The cities come to see us and ask for money. For a long time, the government did not invest in infrastructure, and now it is slowly starting to use common sense. There is an infrastructure deficit that is much larger than the debt service of the past few years.

We are lucky we had this drop in interest rates, which is related more to world conditions—in particular the fact that our American neighbours have lowered their rates in spite of a major budgetary deficit—than to the actions of this government. I would be more than pleased if the government would remedy the situation, because I do not want to see unemployment in Quebec and Canada.

Quebec has the system which most resembles the one they have in Scandinavian countries to manage the labour market. We have a commission which is made up of the various stakeholders. Employers, representatives of the employees—their unions—and people from educational institutions sit at the same table. They examine the main tendencies in the development of special employment niches, and future training needs.

We have also set up local employment committees which do hands-on work in each of the RCMs to meet people's needs. A lot of things have been done. But at the federal level, I still recall the billion dollars that went unaccounted for in the Canada Jobs Fund. I do not think the Liberal or Parti Québécois governments of Quebec need any lesson from the federal government. Our mechanisms are there, and they have proven efficient.

I hope all members will support the motion of the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas, and that this will be the dawning of a new era where we will truly understand the foundations of prosperity.

• (1635)

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from Joliette for agreeing to share his time with me. It was a close call.

I am happy to take part in today's debate, which we owe to my colleague from Chambly—Borduas. I thank him for moving his motion because my riding, like the ridings of many other members, is deeply affected when older workers are victims of mass layoffs. I think that no one here, no matter on which side of the House we sit, can remain unmoved by a mass layoff. We may not have the same approach to solutions but we all make efforts to find some.

The minister said that she supported my colleague's motion. Of course, that is good news. However, there is a glitch. Even though we are glad to have the support of the minister, we hope that she will be able to convince the Prime Minister to support it too. We must not forget that he is the one who abolished the Program for Older Worker Adjustment in 1997, when he was minister of Finance.

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Let me read the motion quickly:

That, in the opinion of the House, due to the increasing number of factory closures associated with globalization, the government should establish a strategy to help older workers who lose their jobs, a strategy that should include income support measures.

As I mentioned earlier, I am very pleased that all parties support this motion. It is high time for the government to take concrete steps to help older workers who are laid off.

I also remind Liberals who support this motion, that they are well known for making promises and not keeping them. We want concrete measures. This strategy has to be put in place now.

We want an income support program for older workers. We want this POWA program to be part of a comprehensive support strategy for older workers. We do not want small pilot projects like the ones mentioned by the parliamentary secretary, the minister and her colleagues since the beginning of this debate. These initiatives are not only insufficient but also far from meeting the current needs of the older workers who have lost their jobs.

Why do we need a specific measure for older workers affected by a permanent major layoff? I will quote what the Canada Employment Insurance Commission had to say on that subject in the report it tabled last March. This report states among other things that:

Although older workers enjoyed considerable employment growth in 2003-04 (5.8% unemployment rate), it is widely acknowledged that once unemployed, older workers may face challenges becoming re-employed. Older workers are over-represented among the long-term unemployed, representing 21.3% of this group and only 12.5% of the labour force.

The Liberal government claims that it is helping older workers with the pilot projects I talked about. The main goal of those pilot projects, created to address massive layoffs, is to train laid-off older workers. However, experience has taught us that older workers are not very likely to pursue this type of training. These projects are therefore clearly inadequate.

The Canada Employment Insurance Commission went on to say that:

Older workers tended to remain unemployed longer—33.6 weeks compared to 23.3 weeks for workers aged 25 to 54. In general, older workers had lower education levels than workers aged 25 to 54 (39.1% of older workers had less than high school education, compared to 18.9% of workers aged 25 to 54)—

We must face the facts. Training is pointless for some older workers. They are in dire straits. We know that, if these older workers are unable to find another job before their benefits run out, they will be forced to apply for social assistance.

In order to get social assistance, they have to qualify for it. So, first they will have to get rid of their assets. These people have worked their entire lives for a house, land, a car and maybe even a cottage. However, before they get social assistance, their last resort, they will have to get rid of everything. It is humiliating for these people, who have often worked 20, 30 or 40 years even in same place and they have to apply for social assistance. This is not a solution.

POWA was an acceptable solution until 1997. Now, we want it reinstated.

● (1640)

We know that some sectors are harder hit than others as a result of globalization and competition from Asia. I am thinking of the textile and clothing industries, among others. Some of these industries are in my riding. I say “some” because there used to be many more. Unfortunately, as a result of competition from Asia and the federal Liberal government's lack of vision, many of them have had to shut their doors.

There is a crisis in the textile and clothing industries, that goes without saying. These industries have to adapt to a new trade environment. On December 31, 2004, the Agreement on Textiles and Clothing, which had been in force since 1995, expired. The end of this agreement meant that the Canadian and Quebec borders were now open to imports, particularly from China, which are mushrooming. And it is the same for other countries.

To add fuel to the fire, the United States, the primary destination for our exports, concluded a series of agreements facilitating the import by that country of clothing manufactured abroad using American fabrics, which has decreased access for clothing manufactured using Quebec and Canadian fabrics.

Textile plants are often the main if not the only business of any size in a number of communities. Do I need to mention Huntingdon again? My colleague from Beauharnois—Salaberry, who sits near me in this House, has spoken considerably of it. He has fought tooth and nail for his people, and I congratulate him on it. The fight is not over. This community has not finished fighting for its survival. It is a tragic event when six businesses in the same sector close at the same time. We can imagine the terrible situation the people and their families are facing.

I would like to speak briefly, as well, about the furniture industry. Where I come from, in Victoriaville, the firm Shermag has just announced it is laying off 175 people in July, when the company will shut down completely. Competition from Asia is again the source of problems.

In this House, I asked the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development what she could do. I requested that a POWA be set up. She did not rise to answer. The Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec responded, telling me that his department did not target this type of business. That is the answer I got. That is the answer our workers got from this government. I have not given up. I will continue to hammer the same message home. This response indicates an insensitivity that is totally unacceptable.

In addition to POWA, I proposed constructive solutions to help the furniture sector. I asked the government to ensure that Asian countries complied with WTO regulations. I called for more power for the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency and the Canadian International Trade Tribunal in order to speed up the complaint process. If it takes two years to investigate unfair trade practices, workers can end up in the street long before a conclusion is reached.

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I called for the creation of tax credits for innovation. Respect is due to the furniture sector, which is undertaking research and development. In many cases, this has not been accepted. I also asked for an accelerated write-off for manufacturing facilities, which would make other investments possible.

I made a quick aside to talk about Shermag, in my hometown of Victoriaville, because this is something that is very near and dear to my heart. I will now come back to POWA.

Still in my riding, and I always like to give local examples because there are plenty, a few years ago the workers of the Jeffrey mine in Asbestos were also hit by massive layoffs. They could also have benefited from a program to help older workers. When I met them during the election campaign, they suggested an improved POWA. It is a proposition that the Bloc Québécois fully supports. We know that a coalition of labour unions, the CSD, the CSN, the CSD and the FTQ, have presented an improved POWA. It is important that we talk about it.

I will conclude by saying that this improved POWA would give older workers benefits allowing them to keep their assets. For the coalition, it is very important that older workers are not faced with an economic downfall forcing them to give up any asset acquired during their life. The support provided by this improved POWA should be equal to the income replacement rate under the EI program, and a minimum threshold should be established, as provided in the POWA since 1987.

• (1645)

I want to mention that the Bloc Québécois has seen a good number of its motions adopted in the House. For those who are wondering what the Bloc Québécois is doing here, I would remind them that not too long ago, we have had several of our motions adopted on issues such as the mad cow crisis, the textile industry, supply management, the judicial appointment process, and so on.

However, I would like this motion to be unanimously adopted in this House.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Social Development (Social Economy), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member is well aware, and as I have said before, I have some experience in the textile and apparel industry. I would invite the member to read my speech in order to see what measures I have taken personally, and with the government, in connection with those industries.

Our two sides have definite philosophical differences, and that we accept.

The EI fund is not intended to keep people unemployed. It is there to help them temporarily when they lose their jobs. That was the philosophy of the federal government. Now there are, however, other programs created to help people who have lost their jobs and who, we realize, are not going to be able to work.

At the same time, I repeat, these workers must also have the opportunity to access employment and training if they wish. Training remains under the jurisdiction of the Government of Quebec, and we acknowledge that. We have transferred \$600 million to Quebec for worker assistance programs.

This is a question I have asked before and I am asking again. It is all very well to demand things, but the government is the one responsible for the actions. The Bloc can try to work with the Government of Quebec, even if it has not had as much success in lobbying it as it would like to have with its Quebec separatist brethren. What is it going to do to encourage the Government of Quebec to create programs for older workers?

I have had the opportunity to encourage the Liberal government of Quebec to put in place a program for these textile and garment workers, who are in need of it. They are not the only ones to have compassion for these workers. A number of members here in this House also feel for them.

• (1650)

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary will have to do her homework once again. I believe she is sincere when she says that she has asked her government for support measures for older workers. I know there are textile industries in her riding and that this is very important to her. However, there is work to be done.

We must be very careful. We are not against training programs for a certain category of workers who are laid off. On the contrary, it is for the better if most workers in an industry that closes its doors find another job after having received training. We are well aware that most workers still have many years to give society by working. We are not interested in putting them on leave.

However, we must also be aware—and the federal government is not, because it abolished the POWA in 1997—that there is a certain other category of workers who cannot find another job, despite two or three years of training. They will not be able to do so. They worked 30 or 40 years for the same business. Perhaps they are less educated than some other colleagues. We know that the best solution to ensure that these people live with dignity is for them to benefit from a program that will help them bridge the gap until the age of retirement.

It is not that complicated. This is not something that is impossible to achieve and that will cost an arm and a leg. We showed that this was possible. This is what we are asking the government.

We are asking the parliamentary secretary and her colleagues to support us on this.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to know if the member for Richmond—Arthabaska sees in the government's approach to EI the same reluctance to develop safeguards as we saw in textile, apparel and furniture industries.

I know that the furniture manufacturers asked the government to order the Canadian International Trade Tribunal to investigate furniture imports from Asia.

Is it not always the same philosophy we see where the government lets the players in the economy, the workers, fend for themselves when they are faced with problems arising from market liberalization?

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Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, the short answer would be yes. That is exactly the problem with the government. We must constantly ask for emergency measures after the crisis has developed.

The government had all the time it needed to put safeguards in place. I am thinking of the textile industry crisis. That is a file the member for Joliette knows very well. We have had 10 years to put in place safeguard measures. Without going so far as closing our borders, we could have implemented some measures to help the textile industry to adapt. That industry could have become competitive with Asian countries and others that are conquering world markets with their textile and apparel.

During 10 years, nothing happened. Then, we realized that something should have been done.

That is the problem with this government: it does not have a vision.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will share my time with the member for Churchill.

I strongly support the motion put forward by the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas. It is a very important motion. It is also a current matter. We know very well that the Liberal government's record is terrible when it comes to job losses in the country. For instance, in the textile sector, 40,000 jobs were lost in Canada, and almost 10,000 in Quebec. Let us talk about the softwood lumber industry. More than 20,000 jobs were lost in British Columbia, and several thousands more throughout Canada. In the cattle industry, beef for example, we have seen tens of thousands of jobs lost.

When it comes to the number of jobs in Canada, we are talking about a crisis. In fact, the government did almost nothing. It did not establish an employment strategy nor did it try to help those workers who are losing their jobs. That is why the motion is so important. It is about a strategy to help older workers.

The issue is not only the number of jobs lost in Canada in recent years under the Liberal government but also the quality of those jobs. In real terms, Canadian workers as a whole are earning 60¢ less an hour than they did 10 years ago. In order to make both ends meet, they have to work an increased number of hours. Even if salaries have remained stable and have not increased, those workers have seen their hourly wage decrease over the last 10 years under the Liberal government. This is a loss of quality. It is an important issue which we must do something about.

There is all this talk about supporting older workers who lose their jobs, but we must recognize that the present crisis, in terms of quantity and quality of jobs, is generalized.

A few months ago, in December, we had a debate on the measures to be taken in response to the disaster which hit Huntingdon. Members of all parties will recall that several factories had closed down. The federal government did not act until other parties in this House forced it to do something and give answers to those workers. In many cases, those who lost their jobs in Huntingdon were older workers.

I referred earlier to 10,000 jobs lost in Quebec and 40,000 across Canada. There has been very little response. The government's

support to the textile and apparel industries in Canada averaged between \$200 and \$300 per company. Since there are close to 4,000 such companies in Canada, the emergency assistance each of them received came to a few hundred dollars per month.

That is the problem. Considering the crises breaking out in several areas and the related job losses, the government is doing very little. The issue of jobs loss must be considered, but also training. As a matter of fact, training is the key to success in a global economy.

• (1655)

[English]

This is the issue that we have had in various industries, crisis after crisis and very little response from the Liberal government to address these various crises in various industries.

We talked about the textile and clothing industry a few moments ago. We have talked about the softwood industry and the loss of over 20,000 jobs in my province of British Columbia. We still have consistent dithering from the government not wanting to change its trade strategy, which is effectively a jobless trade strategy.

While we continue to provide privileged and preferential access to our energy resources in this country, we have done nothing to push forward a Canadian agenda that would allow us to deal with the BSE crisis, the softwood crisis, and these various crises that have led to the loss of jobs across the country.

What has the impact been? We are talking about more children in poverty. We are talking about longer food bank lineups. We are talking about a situation where Canadian families are earning less per hour over the last 10 years. It is 60¢ an hour less in real terms. They are having to work longer weeks to make ends meet.

We also know that the crisis in employment that is taking place in this country affects the quality of jobs. In fact, over the 15 years since the signing of the free trade agreement, it actually created half the number of full time jobs that were created in the 15 years previous. In other words, our trade strategy has been a jobless trade strategy. We have actually created fewer full time jobs. More and more Canadians are working in part time situations, temporary situations, and striving to get through to the end of the month.

Fewer and fewer Canadians, from the Statistics Canada report that came out in January, are working in jobs with pensions. Whereas in most cases, 10 years ago, jobs came with pensions and some income security for people's old age. Now fewer than 40% of jobs in Canada come with pensions or benefits.

Supply

We have seen a jobless trade strategy. We have seen massive loss of jobs in many industries and no action from the Liberal government. As a result, we need motions like this from the member for Chambly—Borduas, so that as we lose these jobs with factory closures, at least we have a strategy to help older workers.

It is important to note that some of the most competitive cities in North America are in Canada. They are here because, for example, our universal and public health care system is a major competitive edge for those companies that are based in Canada. I am ashamed to say that the corporate sector, rather than acknowledging that competitive advantage that our public programs like public health care provide, has been pushing constantly and with some echo of response from at least a couple of corners of the House for more corporate tax cuts.

That is not what we need. We do not need another \$4.6 billion in corporate tax cuts, even though a couple of parties in the House would certainly like to shovel off the back of a truck as much money as possible to the corporate sector.

We need a national job strategy. We need more research and development. We need more training. That is what the NDP agreement on the budget amendment, that forced investment in training and post-secondary education, achieved.

We need more investment in green economic initiatives. Certainly, our leader, the member for Toronto—Danforth, has been the number one advocate in this country in that regard. We need more value added production. We need more investments in physical and social infrastructure because that is a major source of job creation. We need more sources of capital. We have been calling for a national investment fund.

We need less of the outsourcing for which the Liberal government has been pushing. We heard the Minister of International Trade, a few months ago, saying in the House that he would not shed a tear if companies outsourced more and if there were more lost jobs in this country. It is shameful that he would make such a statement.

We are outsourcing the Canadian flag. When I arrived in Washington for a trade mission, I was given a T-shirt made in Mexico and a lapel pin made in the People's Republic of China. I was told to talk to members of Congress and tell them about good Canadian quality products. It is very difficult when the federal Liberal government does not give us one article made in Canada. How many lost jobs resulted from that lapel pin outsourcing which my colleague, the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay, has decried in the House?

• (1700)

We need less outsourcing and less laissez-faire. We need more investment in Canadians and in training. That is why the members in this corner of the House are fully supportive of the motion. We are fully supportive of the creation of good quality Canadian jobs and we are fully supportive of a national job strategy that leads to better quality jobs, not less quality jobs.

It is important to note, when we talk about better quality jobs in the unionized sector, that studies from the United States have indicated unionized companies have a higher level of productivity, more than 20% higher than unorganized companies. Those workers

can feel secure behind a collective agreement and they can work in good quality jobs to contribute to their community and their country.

We support the motion.

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have more of a comment than a question, and that is the hilarity I see in the member from a socialist party waxing eloquent about saving jobs just days after attempting to cancel job saving tax relief in the finance committee and just days after threatening Canadian jobs.

We have seen over the past couple of weeks some turmoil in the auto industry. Regions of the entire country have been facing some rising unemployment. We have concerned Canadians who do not have job security. The companies they work for are competing in a very uncompetitive area because of excessive tax rates.

It is funny to hear that member over there. I truly believe he might be sincere in trying to urge support for saving some jobs in this industry. We know where his leader stands on competitiveness and jobs. He is very anti both. However, just a few days ago his party tried to kill those job saving tax reliefs, which our party has been so adamant about in order to provide families, working Canadians, with security in their industries and in their professions. It is just a comment I would like to make today.

• (1705)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to reply to the party that I believe is now the third party in Ontario, Nova Scotia, British Columbia and in many other parts of the country.

The reason the Conservative Party is falling so rapidly in the polls is because of its knee-jerk, one-note band, which is corporate tax cuts solve everything. If we have a household fire, a corporate tax cut will take care of that. If our kids do not have shoes, a corporate tax cut will take care of that. If our kids cannot get into post-secondary education or if there is not enough housing, a corporate tax cut will solve that. Canadians do not believe that. That is why we see this collapse of the Conservative Party across the country.

One needs a little more substance when one is talking about a Conservative platform. One needs a little more substance to justify the trust of Canadians. Very clearly the Conservative Party does not have the trust of Canadians.

I should mention one more thing. I know the member is from Saskatchewan. It is the appalling disregard of Saskatchewan members in the Conservative Party for our supply management institutions, strongly supported by farmers in Saskatchewan and across the country. We have had absolutely no support from the Conservative Party on supply management institutions. In fact we are finding—

Mr. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The hon. member intimated that the Conservative Party was not in favour of Canada's supply management sector. Our party has been very clear on that. I would like the hon. member to check *Hansard* on that.

The Deputy Speaker: I do not think that is a point of order. The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Social Development (Social Economy), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I did say that there was a philosophical difference in how we view globalization, and that is obvious. I do deplore the fact that jobs have been lost in certain sectors. However, globalization has been an opportunity for Canadian companies in telecommunications, in the financial sector and in other areas to go out and find new markets. I am not sure the hon. member is totally against Canadian companies going out and finding new markets in order to create here at the same time.

I also want to make another comment in terms of the type of protectionist attitude on the part of the Americans, for example, softwood lumber and other industries, and the difference with Canada respecting our international agreements after signing them. We respect them unlike, at times, our American friends who sign the agreements and then decide to put in protectionist policies.

As far as a made in Canada policy, I have to agree with the hon. member. It is something I have raised in terms of the textile and apparel industry. We should have a made in Canada policy that goods should be marked made in Canada.

I just wanted to make those comments because I know we are running out of time and there are other comments to be made.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, one of the major issues around NAFTA is the fact that we negotiated access to the American market, or thought we had, through the chapter 19 provision of the dispute settlement mechanism. In return for that, we gave to the Americans privileged and preferential access to our energy resources, which are, as we know, the second largest in the world.

The Americans have not lived up to their end of the bargain in either the spirit or the actual wording of the chapter 19 dispute settlement mechanism. I believe that as a result of that we need to be very rigorous, tough and fair with our American friends and tell them they are not living up to their end of the obligations so we are not going to live up to ours.

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will try to compress as much as I can within my six minutes. I will try not to repeat a lot of what has already been said. Many good comments have been made here today by our colleagues from the Bloc and my colleagues within the New Democratic Party.

I have a few questions about the others in regard to how we approach the issue, but to get on with the issue of training and educational opportunities for older workers, I think it is crucial that we do not wait until the last moment, when workers have already lost their jobs, before we give them those training opportunities.

I have been here in Ottawa for about eight years. At different times I have called upon the minister and the government to implement access to employment insurance for workers who want to take additional training.

For example, a request came to us from the nurses union. The nurses said they had members who wanted to take advanced training in their nursing profession or in some other profession. They wanted additional training. They may never have collected employment insurance in their lives, but even if they had, they wanted the opportunity to take some additional training.

Supply

Certainly had the workers within the softwood lumber industry been given an opportunity at some point to take additional training, they would have been able to make that transformation to another job without having to go through the crisis of not having employment.

There is a lot that we could be doing within our employment insurance program to prevent the crisis situations for so many unemployed workers, with workers having to go on welfare, their families being under that pressure and the entire system being under pressure. It ends up affecting the health care system and, in a lot of instances, the justice system. It has a major effect throughout the country.

The reality is that there is money in the employment insurance fund. It is not as if there are no dollars available to make those improvements to benefits within the employment insurance fund, certainly to address the issue that we are talking about here today with the opposition day motion, but also on a broader scope to give Canadians the opportunity to enhance their educational opportunities.

I would encourage the government not to look at this issue from just the older workers perspective, which is extremely important, but from the perspective that we need to enhance the opportunities for workers to get that additional training. It is also extremely important to note, and I will highlight this a bit more regarding the older workers, that we are seeing workers staying in the workforce a lot longer, even when they can retire at age 65. We know that a change is afoot to increase the retirement age, because in some work categories people are able to continue working longer. Certainly, though, in other areas people want to be able to leave a type of employment because it is hard on the body and hard on the mind. The longer people are in those jobs the more they feel it from a health perspective.

I think we need to enhance the opportunities for workers to get that additional training. This is something that the government has not been open to. The sad reality of why it is not open to this is that the government is using the employment insurance premium fund for other things. That is the sad reality.

What really sickens me about this is that if we look at that \$46 billion, and we all know it came from EI and has gone into general revenue over the years, the Conservative Party is saying to take that employment insurance money and give a \$4.6 billion tax break at the expense of all Canadians.

Let me say this for my colleague from Regina—Qu'Appelle. That is the riding where I spent most of my younger years. I do not say I grew up there anymore, because I probably grew up after I left the Regina—Qu'Appelle area. I grew up in a small community called Lebret. Here is what I would like to ask my colleague from Regina—Qu'Appelle. What great advantage to Lebret is that \$4.6 billion corporate tax cut?

Private Members' Business

I cannot imagine the benefit, but I can tell the member that I can certainly imagine the benefits of affordable education, affordable housing and improvements in Kyoto measures and environmental issues. All of these will have great advantages for those communities in his own riding, but he is fighting for corporate tax cuts for Bay Street corporations that may want to expand and pay their CEOs a bit more so they can go and get another place in the Cayman Islands or a holiday offshore somewhere. Meanwhile, the people in his own riding would get nothing, absolutely nothing.

• (1710)

I am going to quickly scan the comments that I was writing down as the discussion was going on about EI. The parliamentary secretary had commented in reply to the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster that it is too bad the U.S. does not play fair in the globalization issue on the trade deals. I want to say to the parliamentary secretary, fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me. Shame on the Liberal government for time and time again getting into battles with our southern neighbour and not doing anything about it, not fixing the faults within the trade agreements that have jeopardized jobs in Canada over and over again. Shame on the government for not acting on behalf of Canadians.

• (1715)

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition

motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, June 14 at 9:59 p.m.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES READJUSTMENT ACT

(Bill C-366. On the Order: Private Members' Business)

April 14, 2005—Mr. Simms—Second reading and reference to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs of Bill C-366, an act to change the name of the electoral district of Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor is not present to move the order as announced in today's notice paper. Accordingly, the bill will be dropped to bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

It being 5:16 p.m., the House now stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 5:16 p.m.)

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