



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 141 • NUMBER 095 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Monday, December 11, 2006

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, December 11, 2006

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

•(1105)

[*English*]

CANADIAN FORCES

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC) moved:

That the House affirm its commitment to Canada's military personnel and call on the government to continue to provide them with the best possible equipment and support to carry out their responsibilities.

She said: It is with great pride and honour that I rise in my place today to move this motion.

As the member of Parliament for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, which includes CFB Petawawa, “Training Ground of the Warriors”, which is the motto of Base Petawawa, my motion is for all the women and men of the Canadian armed forces and, more particularly, the loved ones whose job it is to keep the home fires burning.

I take this opportunity in the House of Commons, on behalf of the residents of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, the troops, their families and all Canadians, to thank the Prime Minister for his leadership on behalf of the Government of Canada by demonstrating how much he cares for the soldiers and their families by coming to my riding, to beautiful Cobden, Ontario, and officially turning on the lights for Canada's tallest Christmas tree.

The organizing committee of the 2006 tallest Christmas tree dedicated this year's 75-foot tree to the women and men in the Canadian armed forces and their families. While the beautiful ceremony was broadcast live to our troops in Canadian Forces Base Kandahar in Afghanistan, the tree is dedicated to all our brave women and men who put themselves at risk helping people in serving around the world.

I congratulate the committee members and the volunteers for all their hard work and enthusiasm in making this year's tree lighting ceremony such a big success and also the thousands of upper Ottawa Valley residents who came out to show their support for the troops and to make this year's tree lighting ceremony a resounding success. The tree was decorated by hundreds of Renfrew County school-children, many of whom have adopted a soldier in Afghanistan and have written Christmas letters to let them know that, although they may be far from home, they are not forgotten.

Our community has also created an endowment fund for children who have lost parents in the conflict in Afghanistan.

At CFB Petawawa, the public is raising funds to erect an eternal flame monument, dedicated to all those who keep the home fires burning. I thank retired military spouse Dianne Collier for her work to “light the flame of hope”.

I was reminded of the sacrifice of the families of our soldiers recently when I had the privilege to attend a memorial service in honour of a brave soldier who was killed defending the very freedoms that so many in Canada casually take for granted.

I ask members to please give me a moment of their undivided attention to listen to the following poem written by Jocelyn Girouard, daughter of Chief Warrant Officer Robert Michel Joseph Girouard. Chief Warrant Officer Girouard was recently laid to rest in peace.

Private Members' Business

The poem is entitled *Dear Daddy*:

Dear Daddy,
I did not believe them,
When they told me you were gone.
It did not feel real.
It felt so, so wrong.
God took you away from us,
Without seeming to care.
Your family needs you, Daddy
It does not seem fair.

We are not revengeful,
We are not even cross.
We just feel so sad
Because your presence has been lost
Yes, you will be with us,
Yes, your memories remain.
It just doesn't seem worth it,
Not seeing you march off that plane.

We'll miss you forever,
But you will miss so much.
How can we live without you?
Without your support, your love, your touch?
We need you, Daddy.
We are not ready to go on.
Even though you taught us well,
We are not that brave, not that strong.

You were a soldier, lover, Father, and friend.
We are so proud of everything you do.
We will try to live just like you,
To your memory we will be true.
It's just so hard to believe that you are gone
You can't be gone for good.
You had been our rock for so long,
That our family has been unglued.

Don't feel bad for leaving us.
Think of us with pride.
We'll be OK without you,
We may just have a really hard time.
Think of us, wherever you may be.
We will think of you with love.
We'll remember that you are free,
And you died for all of us.

I thank Jocelyn for allowing me to share her grief, although I appreciate the fact that I cannot begin to feel what she and her family are currently experiencing. I thank her for her courage.

My motion today is for Jocelyn and all the other families and loved ones of our serving military personnel. I call on the entire House to reaffirm its commitment to Canada's military personnel and I ask our government to continue to provide our Canadian Forces with the best possible equipment and support so that they can continue to carry out their responsibilities.

This motion is not just for the Canadian Forces. This motion is for every Canadian, because every Canadian benefits immensely from the essential work that our military does at home and abroad.

• (1110)

[*Translation*]

In the unpredictable world we live in, where international terrorism, weapons of mass destruction and countries that are vulnerable or in decay threaten global security, Canada cannot take national defence lightly.

[*English*]

It is essential that the Canadian Forces receive the support and resources it needs to protect our peaceful society.

What is the mission? Why are we sending the flower of our youth halfway around the world?

We are defending Canadian interests at home and abroad by preventing Afghanistan from relapsing into a failed state that provides a safe haven for terrorists and terrorist organizations. We are providing the people of Afghanistan with the hope for a brighter future by establishing the security necessary to promote development. We are helping the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and its people to build a stable, peaceful, self-sustaining democratic country.

All Canadians can be proud of our accomplishments in Afghanistan, such as ensuring young girls are able to receive an education in safety and security. Our integrated approach of development, diplomacy and defence is helping the Afghan people stabilize their country, establish the rule of law and ensure that Afghanistan never again becomes a haven for terrorists.

Our task is a difficult one. Just yesterday I read a news report that Taliban militants, acting on one of their terrorist threats, murdered two female teachers and three family members. Their so-called crime: trying to give girls an education. This brings to 22 the number of teachers who have been murdered by the Taliban this year alone. These terrorists have no respect for females and little respect for human life.

Are we as Canadians doing all we can to support our brave men and women in uniform?

On May 18, 2004, the Ontario Liberal Party introduced a controversial new tax called the Ontario health premium, breaking its campaign promise to not raise taxes. In the case of Canada's military, the federal government directly provides for military health care. Although military members are excluded by law from being members of provincial health care plans, the Ontario Liberals collect almost \$30 million in premiums from 40,000 regular and reserve military members in Ontario.

The Liberals in Ontario tried to justify this blatant tax grab from soldiers by saying that the premiums pay for services to dependents, even though many soldiers are not married or have no dependents. Yet when the Phoenix Centre for Children and Families in Renfrew County requested \$400,000 to hire therapists and child care counsellors to treat the high levels of anxiety, depression and even trauma among the children and caregivers of military personnel, Mary Anne Chambers, the Minister of Children and Youth Services in Toronto, wrote back saying that, and I refer to her October 3, 2006 letter to Phoenix Centre executive director Greg Lubimiv, supports and services to families and children are a federal responsibility.

Private Members' Business

As the member of Parliament for the riding that includes CFB Petawawa, I was recently contacted by a military couple who, tragically, lost their baby a few weeks after it was born. As both husband and wife are military, they do not have OHIP coverage because the federal government provides for health care directly. As the child died a few weeks after birth, the child would not be covered by OHIP because neither parent has an OHIP number to extend coverage to the child even though both parents are paying thousands of dollars in health care premiums to the provincial government.

This couple received a bill for thousands of dollars. They are Canadian citizens. They are in uniform in service to their country, but they are being treated like second class citizens by the Province of Ontario.

In the previous Parliament, I provided other examples of how military personnel are unfairly treated when it comes to the provision of services in the province of Ontario. I say to Dalton McGuinty and the Liberal Party, "Stop trying to pass the buck". If he is not going to provide services to families and children of our military personnel, he should give back the money he took from them, the \$30 million.

The Government of Canada, through the leadership of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, is doing its part. The people of Canada are doing their part. It is time for the Province of Ontario to get onside and do its part.

I will close my remarks by talking about supporting red Fridays. Close colleagues know that red is not a part of my wardrobe; however, I feel so strongly about supporting our troops that I am prepared to make the compromise every Friday as long as necessary to show my support.

• (1115)

The red Fridays campaign, which began in the U.S.A. in 2005, has been taking Canada by storm since last February. This campaign to show support for our Canadian military is a popular Friday event in my riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, with everyone out and about sporting as much red as they can.

Two military spouses from Petawawa, Karen Boire and Lisa Miller, organized the massive red Friday rally on Parliament Hill last September to start the campaign. Why? It is because it is easy to do, does not cost a penny, unless a person does not own something red to start, like myself, and is so powerful in and of itself.

Friday seemed an appropriate day to acknowledge our support since many workplaces have a relaxed dress day on Friday.

During these troubled times worldwide, many Canadians feel helpless. They want to support our troops but are not sure how. Wearing red on Fridays is a very visible, tangible way to acknowledge the sacrifices of not only our troops but also their families. I ask everyone to join this wonderful campaign and let us see Canada turn red this one day from coast to coast.

I urge all of my colleagues to support the motion. To quote military spouse Sandi Evans, who joined the crowd on Saturday to see the lighting of Canada's tallest Christmas tree in honour of our soldiers and their families, "It's just nice to see everyone coming together to support our troops in Afghanistan".

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I did not interrupt the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke while she named another member of the House. She also looked at me straight in the eye when she did it. I want to give her fair warning that if she does it again while I am in the Chair I will interrupt her.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, less than six weeks ago, the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore had a motion before the House which would have gone a long way to support some of the veterans and some of the members currently serving on some issues.

The member's motion is good and we will support it but I must ask why she did not support the previous motion. Why did the entire Conservative caucus oppose the motion by the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore and then, six weeks later, introduce this motion?

How does she reconcile the spirit of the opposition to that motion and support for this motion?

• (1120)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, I believe the member opposite is referring to the private member's motion dealing with military pensions. I appreciate the opportunity to clarify this misconception and demystify this false perception.

When military personnel retire on pension they receive a full pension until age 65. In addition to what they contributed to CPP and their military pension, they receive, prior the time they retire at age 65, a bridging benefit. When they reach age 65, CPP then kicks in. In reality, the money they receive between the actual time of retirement and age 65 is a benefit they have not paid for. The attempt is to have that bridging benefit equal to what they would be receiving upon turning age 65.

Sometimes people do opt to collect their CPP earlier than age 65, thereby taking a lower amount. What happens is that at age 65, while they would have received a more even amount but because the option was taken at an earlier age, it does appear that they are receiving a lower pension income but that is in lieu of them taking the earlier CPP.

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for bringing the motion to the House and for the good work she does on the defence committee and her overwhelming commitment to our men and women in uniform.

We on the committee have had the opportunity to travel to CFB Edmonton and CFB Petawawa and, hopefully, there will be further travel to visit our troops. Could she be a little more specific about the kind of equipment that is needed, which is referred to in her motion, and also some of the support enhancements that need to be done at home to ensure that the folks left at home are being properly cared for.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, the committee has travelled to CFB Petawawa and CFB Edmonton and the overwhelming response has been that they are appreciative of the equipment they have received so far. They would, of course, like boots that would last a little longer than what they are issued. They would also like to practice with the night vision goggles they have in theatre prior to deployment.

Private Members' Business

Here at home we need to, as was mentioned in my speech, do what we can to help families who are keeping the home fires burning. The federal government is filling every request that comes along within its jurisdiction. We have a request, for example, from the Phoenix Centre for Children in Pembroke that services all of Renfrew county but has very limited resources to serve the children in the area which is suffering from a surge in having to help children through this tough time.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member's Motion No. 244 would reaffirm the House's commitment to Canada's military personnel.

All members of the House and all Canadians support our personnel, whether they are in Canada or deployed elsewhere. However, one of the requirements we have as citizens is that when we send our troops in harm's way, whether we agree or disagree with the policy, we all support the troops. There is absolutely no question about that.

The Canadian Forces have some of the finest soldiers in the world. We are always supportive and committed to their fine work, whether it is in Afghanistan or elsewhere, for the country and the sacrifices they continue to make. In that context, I commend the hon. member for reading that moving poem. It is indicative of the loss and the feelings that families suffer and the pride they feel for the work the soldiers do in theatre.

As is the case generally with the government, it makes lots of noise about supporting the troops but when it comes to concrete measures for the current and former military personnel, it prefers to make noises of support rather than take the opportunity to take concrete measures.

A case in point is the motion by the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore to assist members and veterans of the Canadian Forces and their families. The whole of the government caucus, without exception, like trained seals, stood and opposed the motion. I do not know what happened to their concept of free votes at that time nor do I know what happened to their concept of support for the troops or for veterans at that point.

We are now faced with a new motion to essentially to whitewash the actual sin of opposing that other motion. We do support this motion. All of the opposition parties actually voted for the earlier motion that I talked about.

I have another example with respect to the government. Back in October the government promised to fix the glitch that has resulted in injured soldiers losing their danger pay. The minister said that it would take but a few weeks and here we are two months later and there is still no resolution. The fact is that the troops are continuing to be denied their danger pay, as they ought not to be. The minister has not been able to explain the position with respect to danger pay. Why is it taking such a long time to deal with this very important issue?

I will now go to the issue around Afghanistan in general. That is the same government that tricked this whole House into passing a motion to extend that mission with only a six hour debate. Right in the middle of the remarks by the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister issued a threat. He said, first, that whether or not the House passed

that motion he would have extended the mission in any event by one more year and, second, that he could actually take us into an election.

That is how the government works. It works by gimmicks, tricks and threats. As a result of the government's action in rushing that ill-conceived, ill-planned, ill-prepared motion to extend the mission, we now have a situation where the NATO countries are not there to share the burden in Kandahar. The government did not ask the NATO partners for up front guarantees before we extended the mission for two more years for additional troops and for the removal of the caveats. The fact is that the government rushed into that extension without any thought or preparation whatsoever.

● (1125)

The fact is that the Prime Minister went to Afghanistan, wore a flak jacket and started talking in Bushian and Rumsfeldian terms. He pushed us into this two-year extension for which the NATO partners are not coughing up additional resources and there has been a minor or superficial change in the caveats that should have been changed.

In terms of the equipment, the government has talked a good line. The Conservatives have talked the line of transparency, openness and accountability. The fact is that we are not now spending billions of dollars on equipment that is needed but spending on sole sourcing and fake competitions. There was a fake competition regarding the C-17, the strategic lift. With respect to the tactical lift, all of the requirements were essentially going to go toward one logical conclusion. Whether it is the Chinooks or the Hercules, all of those billions of dollars are being spent without any competition whatsoever.

We know that inside or outside of government, when there is no competition to obtain equipment or whatever else is needed, we do not get the best deals. The government obviously has forgotten that it had promised to deal with the procurement process, make it more open, make it more accountable, and make it more competitive. It has actually made it less so.

In terms of the Conservatives' ability to get the equipment quickly, the Martin government actually made announcements to proceed on some of these purchases. The present government actually abandoned and delayed that process by several months. Therefore, our troops, in theatre or not, are not going to get that equipment as early as they ought to have received it. The government has essentially reannounced the joint support announcement and many other announcements with respect to this.

The overall issue is that the government is rushing into buying equipment without competition, without a full defence capabilities plan. The defence capabilities plan is what actually defines or assesses the needs of the Canadian Forces and then puts the assessment of those needs in full view of the public for discourse and dialogue. The government has not had the courage, the conviction or the tendency to be open to allow the defence capabilities plan to be out in the open. I understand it is languishing somewhere on the cabinet table and it is not being made public at this point.

Private Members' Business

The overall issue with the government is that in an unplanned fashion it has been dealing with the procurement process for the Afghanistan mission and the foreign policy questions. Whenever the government has no plans, it resorts to simply picking up policy from the shelves of the United States of America and sometimes goes further ahead of even the U.S. in pursuing U.S.-like policies.

We have not been able to see any evidence of the government going to the table to NATO and saying the mission in Afghanistan is not working. There is rampant corruption in that government and there is a porous border with Pakistan. In Pakistan there is a Talibanization of northern Pakistan. Suicide bombers are coming into Afghanistan killing our soldiers and killing innocent civilians.

This government has not dealt with that issue or with the infiltration at the border with Iran into Afghanistan. It has not engaged in tough diplomatic efforts to deal with this. It has not engaged in tough dialogue with NATO to ensure that NATO reviews this mission and determines how we can succeed.

Right now we are losing soldiers. They are making great sacrifices, but ultimately I do not see a huge amount of success in Afghanistan. We are not in Afghanistan just to educate girls. That is a great thing. There are dozens of other countries where that needs to be done. We are there to deal with terrorism, so that terrorism does not take hold again. We need to win the hearts and minds of Afghans and Canadians. On both those fronts, this government is losing the war.

• (1130)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Vancouver South is an experienced parliamentarian. He was present in the House and heard me admonish the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke about naming a member of the House. The next time the member refers to the previous government, he might want to refer to it as the government of the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard and not name members of the House. I would like this admonishment to count for all members.

The hon. member for Papineau.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I am astonished that it is necessary to make such a motion.

In my opinion, and no doubt in the opinion of most members of our society, because our soldiers are required to work in such dangerous conditions, it follows that they must have the best possible equipment and the support they need.

Could it be that, for years, we have so neglected our basic duty to these soldiers, who risk their lives to preserve others' lives, that a motion is needed today in order for the government to provide them with an essential: quality equipment?

But we are not talking about updating the army's equipment annually to keep step with technological advances, even though I feel that this is necessary in many respects. What we are saying is that it is unacceptable that soldiers should be at the front with outdated or non-operational weapons or equipment.

However, this motion is warranted, because Canadian soldiers do not have the best weapons or the best equipment to do their jobs. An

example of this would be the fact that Canadian soldiers were deployed to Afghanistan not long ago with the wrong type of camouflage. Such negligence puts them at greater risk and compromises their safety.

In addition, soldiers are increasingly fighting for their survival, especially during the increasingly dangerous missions they are called on to undertake. They need equipment adapted to these new situations and the specific risks they face. For example, the Iltis jeeps proved to be unsuited to the Afghan mission. We must not forget that this cost the lives of at least three soldiers.

Moreover, Canada lacks the clear foreign and defence policies that are needed before troops are sent on dangerous missions. With such policies, Canada could set specific parameters and more effectively plan for missions for which it would be called on to deploy troops. Preliminary studies would help in accurately determining needs, the type of assistance required from Canada, the number of soldiers we actually have and the appropriate equipment for conditions in the field.

It goes without saying that the conditions in Kosovo were not the same as they are for the soldiers in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the lack of forecasting in our foreign policy and our defence policy indicates that the Conservatives are amateurs at this, just like the Liberals were.

We realize there are budgetary constraints. We are in favour of mechanisms that ensure that we have the best equipment at the best price, namely by having open and honest tenders. In June, the government did not respect this principle in every procurement contract. The Bloc Québécois would like to see the taxpayers' money used wisely, which is why it is recommending the implementation of adequate control mechanisms, including the review in committee of contracts worth more than \$100 million. I want to remind hon. members that the former Canadian Alliance members, who now make up the Conservative Party, were in favour of this measure when they were in the opposition.

It is also important to plan for maximum spinoffs from the military contracts to benefit Canada and Quebec. The government's behaviour on that front has us concerned. It did not think it was a good idea to adopt measures to ensure that a significant portion of the planes would be made in Canada, in Quebec in particular, where 55% of Canada's aerospace industry is found.

Furthermore, we find that one way to minimize the need for military intervention is to focus on achieving the UN target of investing 0.7% of GDP by 2015 in official development assistance programs. This objective was adopted by the United Nations in 1970 and Canada promised to respect it.

• (1135)

Nonetheless, since the early 1990s, the official development assistance envelope has not stopped shrinking, going from a little less than 0.5% in 1991-92 to 0.25% in 2000-01. In 2004, Canada ranked 14th out of the 22 countries that make up the OECD Development Assistance Committee, when it was sixth nine years earlier.

Private Members' Business

In summary, weapons and materiel are only part of the equation. A good strategy on the ground, based on a proper concept of the international situation, is vital. Adequate development assistance is also a vital prerequisite. It seems clear that what is currently lacking in Afghanistan is not just equipment, but the means for reconstruction and programs likely to improve the living conditions of the average Afghan. That is what will ultimately keep the soldiers alive and make their mission a success.

• (1140)

[English]

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that the NDP will support the motion before the House today. We support the Canadian military having the best equipment and support possible. At the NDP convention in September, during a plenary meeting on foreign policy, the party supported just such a motion and an even more specific motion, offering support to the men and women of the Canadian armed forces.

What does support for our troops really mean? Does it mean providing the best possible equipment and fair pay and benefits? Absolutely. In the 2005 budget, which my party renegotiated, NDP members supported an increase in military spending. We realized that the Liberal cuts of the past had hurt soldiers and their families and had undermined Canada's ability to carry out humanitarian and peacekeeping missions.

Does it mean providing compensation and adequate support once our soldiers retire? Absolutely. That is why the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, the NDP veterans affairs critic, put forward the veterans' first motion. That motion was passed in the House, but we have had no indication from the government whether it will respect the will of the House. His motion supports getting rid of the so-called gold digger clause so second spouses of Canadian Forces members and veterans have access to pension rights after veterans' deaths.

It supports extending the veterans independence program to all widows of all veterans, regardless of the veteran's time of death or whether the veteran was in receipt of VIP services prior to his or her death. It supports increasing the survivor's pension amount to 66% from the current 50% so military pensions are more in line with the pensions of civil servants. It supports eliminating the unfair reduction of the service income security insurance plan long term disability benefits for medically released members of the Canadian Forces. It also supports eliminating the deduction from annuity for retired and disabled Canadian Forces members. These are excellent proposals supported by a majority vote in the House and the government should move to implement them to really show support for our troops.

I have asked the minister on several occasions, both here and in committee, about support for soldiers who get a pay cut when they are wounded and return to Canada. Members of the forces who are wounded and return from Afghanistan for medical reasons lose their danger pay. Along with the pain and anguish of having a wounded father or mother, families now have to cope with losing money that they were expecting and had planned on when they did their budgeting.

The minister promised he would fix it. He told me in October that it would only be a matter of weeks. Now the weeks have come and gone and there is still no resolution to this problem. The government should show its support for the troops by simply fixing this problem. It cannot be that difficult.

Supporting our troops also means telling our soldiers how long they will be away from their families. There have been claims made that to sustain our commitment in Afghanistan until 2009, we may have to extend rotations from six to nine months. There has been talk of re-rolling airmen and sailors to Afghanistan. In question period I asked the Minister of National Defence to clarify this and to give some assurances to military families about how long their loved ones would be deployed. He gave no definitive answer. He was very vague, in fact.

Does supporting our troops mean supporting each and every mission, without question, where cabinet decides to send the Canadian Forces? I think not. One of our main roles here as members of Parliament is to hold the executive of government to account. We cannot be mere cheerleaders for the spending and misadventures of the executive branch of government.

The most significant decision that any government can make is to send our forces into harm's way in war. The most important role of opposition members of Parliament is to ask the tough questions, to prod the government to ensure that when members of the Canadian Forces are put in harm's way, it is done with good reason. There are many instances in our past where this decision was made for all the right reasons, but that cannot stop us from questioning the decisions of prime ministers to go to war.

• (1145)

Many people may not realize that the military does not get to say no. When the previous Liberal government announced its deployment to Afghanistan, it gave the top generals 45 minutes notice, and they could not say no to the government. Questioning missions and motives is not the role of our soldiers. It is something that we must do as parliamentarians. Supporting our troops should be more than just a slogan. It should be more than just rhetoric. It should be real.

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure today to support the motion tabled by my colleague, the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke. I point out all the fine work that my colleague, the member from Renfrew, has done when it comes to support for the military.

When it comes to the defence critic for the opposition, the member for Vancouver South, I will not use the word "honourable" this time. The fact that anyone would stand in the House and politicize such a thing, as has happened today, is shameful and disgusting. With a friend like that to the military, it does not need enemies.

Mr. Charlie Angus: You did not fight for the veterans. You have a lot of nerve.

Mr. Larry Miller: There is another gentleman behind me who wants to—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound has the floor. I need to hear what he has to say.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay on a point of order.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, we allowed the other speakers to speak. We made no mention of the fact of how they turned down the veterans charter. For them to now stand up and make a cheap remark like that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I thank the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay. That was not a point of order, but a point of debate.

I would appreciate it if the hon. member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound could finish his remarks and then we will go on to the next speaker.

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, that is the kind of politicization we should not hear on such an issue.

On a more serious note, I acknowledge and recognize the family of Chief Warrant Officer Robert Michel Joseph Girouard who is here today. My apologies, Mr. Speaker, I realize I am not supposed to say the family is in the House. It was not deliberate.

Unfortunately, Mr. Girouard was recently killed in battle in Afghanistan. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the family. Mr. Girouard was based in my riding of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound and lived in the city of Owen Sound for five years, while based at the Land Force Training Centre in Meaford.

The motion today asks that the House affirm its commitment to Canada's military personnel and continue to provide it with the best possible equipment and support to carry out its responsibilities.

Canada has always been able to turn to its military men and women when we have needed them. Their tasks have been numerous and often dangerous. Whether defending our domestic shores, fighting forest fires in British Columbia, rescuing a floundering ship's crew in the Maritimes, providing flood relief in Manitoba or participating abroad in missions ranging from humanitarian assistance to combat, we have been able to count on the Canadian Forces.

Although many people expected a declining role for the military in the post-Cold War security environment of the 1990s, the world remained a dangerous and unpredictable place. In the 21st century, Canada faces new security challenges like global terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and failed and fragile states.

I do not have to remind the House that 24 Canadians died in the September 11 terrorist attacks. Since then, attacks in places like Madrid, Bali, London and Istanbul have reminded us of the terrible toll of international terrorism and the constant threat it presents.

The Canadian Forces stand ready to defend us at home and abroad.

More than 3,000 of our armed forces will celebrate the holidays this year deployed on overseas operations, away from their loved ones, their families and their friends. While many of us are busy making holiday plans and decorating our homes, at least 8,000

Private Members' Business

Canadian Forces members are preparing for, engaging in, or returning from an overseas mission. Here at home, another 10,000 soldiers, sailors and air force personnel are diligently working to defend our territory and its approaches, to assert our sovereignty and to serve our communities. This does not include the many soldiers, sailors and air force personnel working to provide support and assistance to ongoing operations.

The demands of the Canadian Forces are significant. It is important that they know that our commitment to them and to the vital work that they are doing remains steadfast. The Canadian Forces are defending our national interests, the security of our country, and the economic prosperity of the Canadian people and promoting Canadian values, democracy and freedom.

We have a clear need for a three ocean navy, a robust army, a revitalized air force and a responsive special forces, an integrated team standing prepared to defend Canada and democracy. The House must continue to provide our Canadian Forces the support they need to carry out these responsibilities.

Right from the beginning of the government's mandate, we have demonstrated our intention to rebuild and revitalize the Canadian Forces. The Minister of Finance announced an additional \$5.3 billion for defence over the next five years in the 2006 budget. We must not stop there.

We recognize the Canadian Forces have long term requirements that need to be addressed. The government is working to address the serious equipment, personnel, and infrastructure challenges created by many years of neglect. There is no denying that it is going to take time and a significant amount of investment to bring the Canadian Forces back up the level where they once proudly stood. We are looking for the House to support us in this important task.

● (1150)

The government has moved to ensure that the forces serving in Afghanistan and on other deployments both in Canada and abroad possess the right training and equipment to deal with the challenges of their missions.

In June of this year we moved forward with a series of equipment purchases and related support services valued at \$17.1 billion. The Minister of National Defence announced the planned purchase of four strategic lift aircraft, 17 tactical lift aircraft, six medium to heavy lift helicopters and 2,300 medium size logistic trucks, plus three supply ships.

We will increase the size of the Canadian Forces. Over time our military will grow by 13,000 regular forces and 10,000 reserves. By doing so, the Canadian Forces will have enough trained people to handle the many tasks imposed on them. To meet these targets, the Canadian Forces are expanding and streamlining our recruitment and training systems. This has brought significant success. In fact, as of this month, we are starting to see applications being processed within one week. Previously this was unattainable.

Private Members' Business

Canadians are doing their part by visiting our recruiting centres and signing up to serve. Interest in the Canadian Forces as a career is growing. Last year the recruiting targets were exceeded by 6% and Department of National Defence officials are confident that we will hit its recruiting targets this year.

We are also dedicated to taking better care of those who have readily and unselfishly pledged to defend and protect us. Canadians who have chosen a military career, those who have answered what our Prime Minister called the highest calling of public service, have more than just demanding jobs. They cope with significant stress. Their jobs are often dangerous. The physical demands can be daunting. They deal with long separations from their homes, their families and their friends. They miss birthdays, special holidays, first words and first steps, and as we all know, some have made the ultimate sacrifice. These burdens are shouldered by not only the members of the military but by their families.

In April of this year we launched the new veterans charter. This represents the most profound transformation of veterans services and benefits since the second world war. This new charter builds on existing services and benefits to help traditional war service veterans live with dignity and address emerging needs of a new and different type of veteran. It contains provisions for job placement assistance to help military retirees transition into the civilian workforce. Our Canadian Forces have served with duty, honour, loyalty, integrity and courage, and they deserve our support during and after their military service.

In closing, we must continue to provide them with the proper equipment. We must continue to reinforce their skills with the proper training. This government is showing that support. We will continue to show that support. I ask every member in this House to also show his or her support.

● (1155)

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a former defence minister, I had the honour of seeing our brave men and women of the Canadian Forces at work fighting forest fires in British Columbia, cleaning up the devastation from hurricanes in Halifax, doing their job in Bosnia, in Kabul, Most poignantly back in June 2002 I saw them under the most difficult conditions in Kandahar where the temperature was 50° Celsius but one hardly noticed the heat because of all the sand in one's eyes. Over all those experiences no one has acquired a greater admiration than I have for the bravery, the commitment and the dedication of those brave men and women of the Canadian Forces.

I remember battling the bureaucracy once to fight a stupid rule which we managed to change whereby it was said that a soldier who lost his legs in the service of his or her country would get several hundred thousand dollars in compensation, but only if that person was the rank of colonel or above. No one has to be a genius to figure out that most of those likely to lose their limbs would be of a lower rank. We got that through but we had to fight the bureaucracy to do it.

That brings me to my point about the government, because words are cheap. I find the government's actions lacking. If the government were true in its commitment to our brave men and women, it would

have taken on the bureaucracy but it has failed to do so. I will give three examples.

First, on the motion by the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, the government members all stood up like trained seals and voted against the measure which would have brought real assistance to current and past members of our Canadian Forces in terms of their pensions and disabilities. Why did they do that?

The second example was already raised by my colleague. Injured soldiers in Afghanistan lose their danger pay. The Minister of National Defence said a couple of months ago that he would fix that quickly. He has not fixed it yet. The months go by. I know defence. I know the bureaucracy will give him 101 reasons why it cannot be done, but he is the minister and the Conservatives are the government. If they had the will to help those injured soldiers, they would order the bureaucracy to do it and it would have been done some time ago.

We hear nice words from over there. Where is the action? Where is the fight against the bureaucracy to do what is right for our brave men and women in Afghanistan subject to those injuries?

My third example has to do with the vote in the House of Commons some months ago to extend the mission in Afghanistan. Even though I as a former defence minister have huge support and admiration for our brave men and women, I voted against that motion on the grounds that it was blatantly political and exhibited disrespect not only to parliamentarians but far more important, disrespect to the brave men and women of the Canadian Forces.

When we are making life and death decisions, there are two ways to go. Either we do it through the cabinet, the defence minister and the Prime Minister who have access to all the information, or we do it through parliamentarians as they do in Holland. There it takes weeks or months. There are hearings and the parliamentarians then have the full amount of information on which to make an informed decision. Those are two legitimate processes.

What is a totally illegitimate process is the few hours of debate in which parliamentarians were asked to vote with absolutely no information. Parliamentarians were asked to make life and death decisions after a few hours of debate as part of a blatantly political process in which no information was given.

In my view such a move as the Prime Minister made is not only insulting to parliamentarians in asking them to vote with no information on a critical issue, but it is also insulting to our men and women of the Canadian Forces, that their fate would be decided on the basis of a process where those voting yes or no were not given any information.

Government Orders

I will support this motion because no one supports our men and women of the Canadian Forces more than I do. However, I would challenge the government to not just deal with words but to deal with actions. I challenge the government to stand up for those who are injured and not allow their danger pay to be taken away; to stand up to the bureaucracy in terms of the levels of pensions and benefits; and when life and death decisions are being made to do so with a process that is respectful of those whose lives are put in danger.

• (1200)

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, if the House gives its consent, maybe we could see the clock as at the end of private members' business so the member will have a full period of time for his speech. He would be the first up next time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper. When we next deal with this matter, the hon. member for Edmonton Centre will have the floor.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There have been consultations and I think you will find the unanimous consent of the House for the following motion regarding the notice period for the prebudget debate.

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, 24 hours' written notice shall be the time provided for the filing with the Clerk of the government motion "That this House take note of the Eighth Report of the Standing Committee on Finance, presented to the House on December 7, 2006".

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2006, NO. 2

The House resumed from December 8 consideration of the motion that Bill C-28, A second Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on May 2, 2006, be read the third time and passed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): When we last considered Bill C-28, the hon. member for Western Arctic had seven and a half minutes left for his comments. He has the floor.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during my previous speech I spoke about the serious issue of tax fairness for northern people. As I indicated, the other issue that I wanted to speak to in this discussion regarding northern issues is the need to change the way that we are funding northern territories. We have had an expert panel reporting on how to change the funding formula for the territories, and I had just started in on this when my time was up on Friday.

I will just repeat that we have identified four key issues that stand in the way of the north achieving its full potential.

The first is a new fiscal arrangement with Ottawa, one that truly reflects the needs of the Northwest Territories. The current fiscal arrangement cannot continue. Not only is it inadequate but in many ways it acts as a disincentive to the Northwest Territories moving forward.

My territory is very much controlled by this august Parliament, unlike the other provinces and regions of this country. This Parliament really does play such an important role in what happens in the north. As a northerner, I have railed against that for my whole life. I have felt, in some ways, the inadequacy of my citizenship, living where I do in the north. Certainly, part of it is the way that the Government of Canada deals with northerners.

As such, we all hope that as the resources of our territory are extracted and developed, they will mean more self-determination for us as citizens of the north. There is no question about that. If our resources simply get taken and we end up, at the end of the day, with what we have now, that would be a tremendous letdown and a tremendous failure of the Canadian system which is to recognize that we are all equal across this country and that we all have equal political rights.

The federal government provides about 70% of the funds for the Northwest Territories, but that really does not make the NWT a have region because this government, not the northerners, owns the vast riches of the territories. Nearly as much goes to Ottawa in royalties, in land sales and in corporate taxation. Nearly as much goes to Ottawa right now from the Northwest Territories as comes in to the Northwest Territories.

With a proper fiscal regime that would put our resources on the same level as other provinces where governments collect considerably more royalty revenues, we would be in a positive situation in the Northwest Territories. We would be ahead of the game.

The Government of Canada has chosen to subsidize businesses that develop in the north at the expense of royalties and taxation that could make the difference between us being a have and a have not province. Province is a term I use somewhat lightly because we are a province in waiting. In the Prime Minister's letter to the NWT, he wrote:

Government Orders

The Conservative Party of Canada agrees unequivocally with the principle that northerners should be the primary beneficiaries of the revenues generated by resource development in the Northwest Territories similar to other jurisdictions in Canada. We also agree that the transfer of authority over lands and resources from Canada to the Northwest Territories (devolution) is the next logical step in the political development of the Northwest Territories.

Northerners would really like to know when this is going to happen and how this is going to happen. If this is the mandate of the Government of Canada, will it say it very clearly to its new emissary, Mr. Harvie Andre?

• (1205)

In 2004-05, public accounts showed that the federal government took in over \$270 million in royalties and resource revenue from the Northwest Territories and the amount is growing every year. That amount went up quite a bit last year as well. Those figures have not come out, but that is because our second diamond mine is now into production. At the same time that does not include the corporate taxation that goes with that.

In comparison, the Northwest Territories public accounts showed only \$3.5 million in corporate income taxes in that same year. This goes back to a problem that we have just like every other province or political region in the Northwest Territories and that is, if we set our corporate tax rate a little higher than anyone else, then of course the corporations are all filing somewhere else.

We have bounced around over the years because where we had huge surpluses, we lowered the rate and then everyone followed us down and then we balanced out. Then we raised the rate and then we got nothing. That is a fundamental problem with the tax system in Canada which should be addressed by the federal government. There should be some federal-provincial understanding on corporate taxation to avoid this kind of loophole, to avoid this kind of competition that takes the money out of the hands of the provinces and the regions.

People in the north simply want a fair deal from Canada in how our interests are treated. Whether it is on taxation or funding for government programs and services, we actually want to benefit and build our territory on the resources that we have. We want to make that happen for Canadians for the future. I hope in the future that the government will do much better than this budget in dealing with northern concerns and issues. The improvement has to take place.

• (1210)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Questions and comments. Resuming debate, the hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): My apologies to the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay. I did not see him. I recognize him under questions and comments.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was thinking I might have to start wearing some brighter coloured clothes like my colleagues from the Bloc just so that I would be recognized.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague a question based on his experience in the Northwest Territories because what he speaks of mirrors so closely the experience we have in northern Ontario. We

too are a region which is based on resources. We are based on hydro. We produce some of the cheapest hydro in the world and yet our industries have no access to that cheap hydro. We are paying what they pay in Mississauga when they turn on their air conditioners in the summer.

We are based on mining and mining is non-renewable. We have had many communities that have been driving the economic engine of Ontario through hard times, yet when these towns fall on hard times, they disappear off the map.

We have forestry which is another mainstay of our economy. Many of our forestry communities are going under. There is question that has been asked again and again in northern Ontario. A fundamental disparity exists when a region is resource-based. It has to be able to access some of the wealth of the region in order to diversify and build an economy that is not simply based on drawing out the water and cutting the trees, but is based on taking that wealth and building a sustainable and diverse economy.

Given the hon. member's experience in the Northwest Territories, how does he suggest a region like the Northwest Territories, the northern Arctic or northern Ontario can move forward with an agenda that works for the resource-dependent regions of the north?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, I know my colleague sometimes blends into the windows that are behind him.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I am so shy.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: And he is so shy that it makes it difficult.

There are fundamental differences in the Northwest Territories, which is an autonomous region and which theoretically, quite plausibly, along with northern Ontario should be a province in waiting.

What is not different about those areas is what the member alluded to. He said that when the government does not pay attention to the northern regions, when it allows them to be exploited without building the infrastructure and proper communities, without making the things happen that will leave behind substance, we end up with something far less satisfactory.

When the government does not do that and we allow ourselves to be manipulated by government and large corporations into doing things in the cheap and dirty fashion, which has been the practice for the last 20 years and which is a practice that has to stop in this country, we end up with something that is far less satisfactory than what we have.

I know that the hon. member's riding has representation at Queen's Park. Ontario is one of the dominant provinces of Canada. How these conditions can go on in this region year after year is something that really shocks me.

In my own territory, I can always blame it on Ottawa. I am able to say that Ottawa is not doing its share. My colleague has to deal with that provincial relationship.

Government Orders

What binds us across the north are the things that the federal government is able to do. I spoke about this earlier when I talked about tax fairness. We need some fairness in the system. The federal government agreed in the 1980s that it was fair to offer northerners right across the country an extra tax break because of their high costs. The government has recognized northern and remote communities in Parliament and in our taxation. What we need to do is to make it fair again.

• (1215)

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak on Bill C-28, A second Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on May 2, 2006.

When looking at a budget, the challenge of any government is to balance a budget that is going to ensure economic productivity and competitiveness and ensure people have money in their pockets. It should try to find a balance, that yin and yang between being able to have a productive dynamic economy and having the resources to provide the social programs we enjoy. As well, ensuring that individual Canadians have the maximum amount of money in their pockets and that governments do not waste money is the challenge of any budget.

The fundamental question of this budget is whether it meets that test. Does it enable our country to have a productive, dynamic economy and also provide the resources to allow us invest in the infrastructure we require in order to have a productive economy? Does it enable us to have the resources to provide for the social programs that all Canadians enjoy? I would argue that this budget fails on all of those counts. I will go through the reasons.

If we look at the global context, we can see in the future a greater amount of competitiveness in the world from giants such as India and China. They are on an economic juggernaut that will increase as time passes. It is up to us to change, modify, improvise and become more dynamic in order to stay ahead of those countries. If we fail to do so, we will suffer.

Right now Canada stands at eighth or ninth in the world in terms of economic productivity. That is okay, but we can do better. I am going to outline ways in which this budget fails as well as solutions for how our country can improve its productivity, for the reasons I mentioned.

This bill deals with a number of income tax measures. I am going to go through them in a second. I also want to say that the fundamental aspects of a balanced budget that will be useful are that the budget is indeed balanced, that there is responsible spending, there is debt reduction and there are tax reductions so that we will have a competitive international tax rate. I have mentioned the reasons why we ought to do that.

I also want to mention one of the profoundly disappointing aspects of this budget. Canadians would be very interested and very disappointed, I think, to know that this budget by the present government actually increases the taxes on the most vulnerable in society, the poor and the lower middle class.

How does it do that? The government increased the lowest tax rate that exists in our country. It also reduced the basic personal

exemption. The government argues that the balance to that is the dropping of the GST, a consumption tax, but does a consumption tax really benefit the middle class and the poor? Dropping a consumption tax like the GST benefits primarily the rich, because in order to benefit from that, one has to spend. The more one spends, the more one benefits.

The people who are struggling to survive do not spend that much; ergo, they do not benefit as much. When government takes money out of the pockets of Canadians, it hurts Canadians selectively. Therefore, the wisest thing the government could have done in terms of productivity and of fairness, I would argue, would have been to drop the lowest income tax rates and increase the basic personal exemption. That puts real money in the hands of Canadians.

There is a reason why this budget is so peculiar and particular in certain areas, why it cherry picks certain benefits and does not deal with global tax reductions for individuals, particularly the poor and middle class. The reason is that this is a cynical budget. It is a budget that is designed to curry favour with the electorate. Naturally all political parties want to do that, but to do that by cynically parking one's brains at the door and not implementing solutions based on fact, reason and science is irresponsible.

Instead, the government and this budget are engaging in irresponsible behaviour because the solutions are based on cynically trying to curry favour with the public and putting forth woolly-headed solutions that sound good on the one hand but are not very effective. I gave the example of the GST cut. On the surface it sounds very exciting and good, but unless one spends a whole lot of money, which means one is rich, it is not really going to benefit the rest of Canadians. The fact is that Canadians with low or modest incomes are struggling hard these days. The increased tax burden on them is irresponsible.

• (1220)

One of the tax benefits the government has introduced in this bill is something called the Canadian employment tax credit. On the surface, that sounds wonderful. It is \$1,000, but in reality, if we read carefully, we see that it is a tax credit for those who are working. Those who are unemployed and those who are really struggling, the most vulnerable, cannot access this. In fact, those who are working and making minimum wage or close to it do not pay very much in the way of taxes, so this kind of tax credit is not of as much benefit to the most vulnerable in our society at all. It does not help them at all.

What would be smarter? Earlier this year, I introduced something called the Canadian low income supplement, for which I have a private member's bill that will be introduced in the House in the next little while, a bill saying that a person who makes \$20,000 or less will receive a cheque for \$2,000, tax free. That number will decline to zero in a linear fashion, down to \$40,000.

Why? Because this is real money in the hands of those who need it the most. A tax credit for those who do not make much money is utterly immaterial, because either they do not pay tax or the tax is so small that it does not really amount to much. When we so-called help those who are of modest means, we give them \$50 a year.

Government Orders

Also, my bill does not apply only to people who work. It applies to people who do not work and who are on fixed incomes. For example, all of us here know seniors in our ridings who are living on fixed incomes. They have given their lives to our country and are living on a very tiny amount of money. The amount of money in my bill, the \$2,000, is real money, tax free, in their hands. It will enable them to live and put food on the table. If people are younger, this will enable their children to have various benefits. If people are older and retired, it will enable them to pay for medications that are not covered, as well as a host of other challenges our seniors face day in and day out.

The Canadian low income tax supplement that I introduced earlier this year is something that the government ought to adopt. I hope Canadians who are listening will put pressure on the government, because this would mean real money in the hands of the most vulnerable in our society. It is fair, equitable and humane. It will help those in our society who are most impoverished.

Let us look at another couple of tax measures that are in this bill. One is the Canadian textbook credit of \$500 annually, a credit for textbooks for students. On the surface it sounds good, but how does it actually materialize and get into the hands of a student? The tax credit is multiplied by the lowest income tax bracket. Therefore, this tax benefit is actually worth only \$77.50. That is right. This \$500 tax credit is worth only \$77.50 in the hands of students. That, as we know, will not pay for even one single textbook for most courses in post-secondary education.

The next issue is the transit tax to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We know that the government's so-called clean air act has been an absolute bust full of hot air. What would be a series of solutions that would actually reduce greenhouse gas emissions? I will give members a few.

If we take a look at greenhouse gas emission reduction, we will see that it is tied to our burning of fossil fuels, so the question is, how do we reduce fossil fuel consumption? I have a few suggestions.

Perhaps the simplest way of doing that is tied to how we build our homes. We lose an incredible amount of energy in our homes. We know that the technology exists today to build our homes more efficiently and substantially reduce our consumption of fossil fuels. China is making buildings that produce 70% less greenhouse gas emissions than buildings of a similar size in North America.

What the government can do is go back to adopting the EnerGuide program that it so callously cut because it was so-called Liberal. It may be something that we introduced, but the reality is that the EnerGuide is a good program. It enables people to have the tools, resources and know-how to provide and implement those changes in their homes that will reduce the consumption of fossil fuels and, therefore, the production of greenhouse gas emissions.

● (1225)

I have another couple of suggestions. As we know, cars made before 1986 produce 37 times the number of greenhouse gas emissions produced by a car made after 1996. That is absolutely staggering. By removing from the road one car built prior to 1986, we are actually reducing by the equivalent of removing 37 cars made after 1996.

The government should provide a tax break or eliminate the GST for anybody who takes a 1986 car off the road and buys a car made after 1996. It would be simple and easy to do. In effect, this is an example of tax shifting. The Minister of Finance should take a look at it. Frankly, it ought to be in this bill. It would enable us to shift the tax and encourage people to adopt actions that are more energy sensitive and environmentally sensitive.

Another issue is the Canadian children's fitness tax credit. This is a \$500 tax credit for a parent, but again, it is only worth \$77.50 because it is multiplied by the lowest tax rate. A parent would actually receive \$77.50, not \$500. The purpose behind this tax credit was noble: helping parents get their kids to become more active. We know that childhood obesity is at epidemic proportions in our country. How do we deal with this issue?

It would be smart to do two things. First, as I have argued repeatedly in the House, and in fact we passed it in this House in 1998, would be a headstart program for children. It could be adopted in the following way. The Minister of Health should call together all the ministers of health and the ministers of education from across Canada and tell them they should be providing this program for all children up to and including grade 3. Parents would be allowed to go into the class once every two weeks for two hours, if they wanted to, and they would deal with issues such as physical education, literacy and nutrition. Parents would be working with their kids on these three important things.

Literacy and physical education would be used, along with proper discipline, proper care and nutrition. This would have a profound impact on the lives of these children. The pillars and benchmarks would be laid for a solid individual in the future. Prior to the age of 8, neurons in a child's brain are actually quite malleable. They change. What a child experiences at that time could have a positive or negative impact on their future. It would be a smart move if the Minister of Health worked with his counterparts across the country to implement a headstart program.

The other thing that could be done is the implementation of a mandatory physical education program in schools, up to and including grade 11. Mandatory physical education would be very helpful in getting kids physically active during the course of the day.

As I said, it is very important that a budget such as this deal with productivity. I am going to outline a few solutions we could implement that would dramatically improve our productivity and enable us to be really competitive with those giants at our heels right now, particularly India and China.

First, we could reduce the basic personal exemption. Second, we could reduce the lowest tax rate. Third, we have to make sure that we reduce the tax rates on businesses so they are competitive across our country. Ensuring that we have a competitive business tax regime is extremely important.

Government Orders

With respect to surpluses, we should implement the one-third, one-third, one-third rule. One-third would be debt reduction; one-third would be spending on critical areas, which I will mention in a second; and one-third would be tax reductions for businesses and individuals.

With respect to investment, it is very disappointing that the government did not continue the research and development investments that my party made over the last five years. R&D is an absolutely integral part of our ability to be competitive. Therefore, I have no idea why the Conservative government chose to dramatically decrease research and development investment. This is one of the pillars of a vibrant and productive economy. Some of that money ought to be going to universities and colleges. Some of it should be used to encourage the private sector to reinvest profits into businesses.

• (1230)

The government should work with the provinces to harmonize the PST and GST to ensure that provincial sales taxes are not applied to business inputs but into their businesses.

The PST in some provinces is exempt from business inputs and in others it is not. The federal government could work with the provinces to ensure there is no PST or GST on business inputs, which would enable companies to make the investments they require.

On education, let us enable our students to get the higher education they require. With costs escalating, I find it reprehensible that individuals in our society are barred from accessing higher education because of the amount of money in their pockets. A fundamental tenet of our country is that everyone has the equal opportunity for success, not equal outcomes but an equal opportunity to be the best that they can become.

The fact that tuition fees have escalated so high and, quite frankly, have become a barrier for some people to access the education they require, is something the government should put its full effort into with its provincial counterparts.

In infrastructure, the government should be adopting the cities agenda that we started. The cities agenda is extremely valuable in ensuring that investments and monies that we have at the federal level will be driven at the municipal level for the needs of local communities. We did that. The agreements were hammered out with the provinces and municipalities and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities was very happy with that. I implore the government to continue with the program.

As the House knows, there are greater barriers to trade east-west than there are north-south. My province of British Columbia has signed a landmark deal with the province of Alberta to dramatically reduce and almost remove the barriers to trade between British Columbia and Alberta. There is no reason that the federal government cannot take a leadership role with the provinces to do this.

How would it work? The Minister of Finance, the Minister of National Revenue and the Minister of Industry should work with their provincial counterparts to call a trade council together where

we put forward the trade barriers, eliminate those that are unnecessary and useless and we move on. It is a major restriction.

I will give one example, which is labour. The fact that somebody who is trained in Ontario cannot work in British Columbia or that somebody trained in B.C. cannot work in Newfoundland is ridiculous. The fact that we are all trained in the same country and yet our skills are provincial specific is an absurd situation. It is a major restriction to labour mobility and a major drain on the ability of our country to be economically competitive. I encourage the government to work with its provincial counterparts to do that.

When we were in government we started the smart regulation initiative, which took a ruthless look at the regulations. We started hacking away at and removing all those regulations that were unnecessary. The groundwork is there. The minister should take a look at this, continue with the smart regulation initiative and reduce those barriers to trade.

My last point is on the issue of immigration. With our changing demographics we know that the ratio between the retired population to worker population is increasing. We can do two things. First, retire the mandatory age of retirement. If the 65 of today is the new 50, why on earth do we not allow people who are 65 and above to work? It is absurd given the demographic changes that we require. These are smart, productive, willing people who want to work. They would be a boon to our economy.

Second, with respect to immigrants, many of the immigrants in our country are working on the margins because they may be here illegally. However, to ensure we honour the law but also enable these people to become integrated into our society and not live at the margins, we should give these people an opportunity to come in from the cold, apply for a worker's permits, give them a two year permit and renew it a couple of times. If they are law-abiding, pay their taxes and are employed, we then give them the chance to become Canadian citizens.

I have provided the government with a series of solutions and opportunities that it can take which would enable our country to be more productive. I am sure the government will find widespread support from across Parliament to give effective solutions to the benefit of our great people.

• (1235)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on the notion of moving up the mandatory retirement age from 65. I think that is a good idea and something that needs to be looked into.

One of the things we have repeatedly heard at the finance committee concerns bumping up the age at which we need to convert our RRSP into RRIF. The suggestion has been that we move the age from 69 to 71, which is what it was before the change was made about 10 years ago.

Government Orders

I wonder whether the hon. member has a comment on whether that appears to be a good idea. It is consistent with his notions of changing the retirement date. Does he have any thoughts as to whether, given his mental—I mean medical background, possibly his mental background as well or possibly his heavy metal background, for which I am sure there is some hearing loss, 71 or 73 might be a more appropriate age given that we are all medically a little healthier than we were in the past?

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, I will not make any comment about his preamble as it would be telling far too much.

As the former parliamentary secretary to the minister of finance, he is well-versed in these issues. We can do a few things. I agree with him about shifting the age upward for the RRIF but we can do two more things.

First, we could allow people to take, say, \$10,000 from their RRSP after the age of 55, tax free, if they make below a certain amount of money. The reason for that is that there are costs we incur as we get older, particularly medical costs. Why not allow people to access those funds from their RRSPs, tax free, to enable them to provide for themselves? That could be something innovative.

Second, if we were to completely abolish the mandatory age of retirement, in order to give an incentive to keep people engaged in the workforce but also lessen the pressure on our CPP, we could do the following. I introduced a bill that would work like this: at 65 we would receive 50% of our CPP, tax free; at 66, 60%; at 67, 70%; and at 68, 80%. What would this do? It would keep people engaged in the workforce, lower the demands on the CPP, improve our productivity and give people more money in their pockets at a time when they may need those moneys in their pockets because of personal circumstances. In doing so, it would be a win-win situation for all concerned.

Those are innovative solutions that we could adopt and they would be helpful to people as they get older.

It is interesting that when the mandatory age of retirement was put forward at 65, the average life expectancy was only 58. People thought they would never reach that age so they thought it was a small thing. Women are now living to the age of 82 and men to 79. It is now incumbent upon us to rethink the situation.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, in the absence of any other interventions, I think this is actually an interesting conversation. I like to see that the hon. member has actually thought about some of these issues.

Another issue that came up at the finance committee was allowing self-employed people to have access to actual pension plans that operate like an employer pension plan as opposed to an RRSP. I thought there was some merit in that idea because a lot of people are not very versed in investments and things of that nature. We could have a fiduciary entity, such as a large trust company, a fund company of some kind or another or possibly the government itself, operate as the pension entity so that people could actually make contributions in the same way that they make contributions to their pension, as would their employer make contributions.

I was wondering whether, for self-employed people or for people who have irregular income, the hon. member thinks that might be an idea that is worth exploring by the government?

● (1240)

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is very well versed on this and, as a parliamentary secretary, I know he has worked extremely hard with our former minister of finance to implement many of the solutions.

If viewers were to look back in history and look at the innovative partnership that occurred there, they would see the types of innovations that were implemented on behalf of the Canadian public.

The member's suggestion is very good because those people who are self-employed do tend to fall between the cracks. Their income ebbs and flows as time passes. It is very important that we look at the fiscal pressures that are placed on people as they get older.

I suggest that the demographic time bomb that is before us is the most under-represented and underappreciated issue of our day. Unless we implement the solutions today to deal with those challenges, a lot of people will be unnecessarily hurt.

Quite frankly, all we need to do is take a look at the European experience and the pressures being applied to the pension structure in Europe and we will see how worrisome this is. We need to look at that in order to implement the solutions today that will ensure Canadians as they get older will have the money they need. Some solutions that we have worked on for some time could provide that.

However, if we fail to deal with this today it will be a gross act of negligence on the part of the government. I implore the government to do that and to work with the rest of us to implement these solutions for the benefit of our citizens.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, the area that the hon. member is talking about is at least one of the foremost challenges facing any government today, and it does not really much matter whether it is Liberal or Conservative.

Does the hon. member have some comments with respect to not only moving up the age, but what the impact of moving up the age from 65 to something else would be in situations where there is a defined benefit plan which is in trouble? My recollection is that there is something in the order of 50% of plans that are not fiscally sustainable at this point, given the year and the date at which the beneficiaries would cash in. If the date were moved forward, or up, their fiscal sustainability would be there.

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It would also have an interesting impact on the Canada pension plan. Right now, due to the work of the previous government, the Canada pension plan is fiscally sustainable for another 75 years. If there were small changes such as that, we would suddenly take the pension crisis that we are potentially facing and, as I say, it does not matter which government will be on that side of the aisle, change the entire conversation and the dynamics. How to deal with people who have legitimate expectations at 65 is another issue.

Has the hon. member given some thought to that kind of an issue?

• (1245)

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, I think there is a situation that people must understand. When I said that one could retire later on, I think there should be no mandatory age of retirement. However, if people want to retire at 65, that would be the age upon which they could access their CPP. They would receive their full CPP if they simply chose to retire at 65 and they would access all of what they were entitled to.

However, if people wanted to continue to work, the incentive for them to work would be that they would receive 50% of their CPP at 65 and it would increase as time passed year by year, receiving full CPP at the age of 70 if they were to continue to work, and there is no reason on earth why they cannot.

What we need to realize about this demographic time bomb is that if nothing is done we not only have a shrinking workforce, but we also have increasing demands on our social programs.

Many good people in this country have done some great work, including those at Simon Fraser University and in the House, such as my hon. colleague. All of us would be willing to help the government to deal with this issue that is most pressing.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to Bill C-28, an act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on May 2, 2006. As we all know, the Bloc Québécois supported that budget.

I am especially pleased to speak to Bill C-28 here today because several measures in this bill are quite similar to measures that the Bloc Québécois has been proposing for many years. Consider, for example, the tax credit for public transit passes. I seem to recall that one of our colleagues already proposed in this House a private member's bill that was very similar. Another example is the textbook tax credit. For some time, the Bloc Québécois has been calling for the elimination of taxes on all products and services related to books. This has been done in Quebec. This encourages access, not just to textbooks, but to all literature, regardless of target audience, since we must start somewhere.

Finally, the tax break for microbreweries—in fact, the government has extended it to all breweries—is completely in line with what the Bloc Québécois has been proposing. The Standing Committee on Finance also looked at this issue several times. Bill C-28 finally contains this provision, which we have wanted for quite a while now.

There are also provisions to help the next generation. This has been a major concern of the Bloc for quite some time. We even

organized a symposium together with the Union des producteurs agricoles on the next generation of farmers. It is important, therefore, to have provisions in the act that facilitate the intergenerational transfer of businesses, although I will have a chance later, of course, to say that much more could have been done in this regard and in other regards as well.

In addition, there are provisions to help apprentices and tradespeople acquire the tools they need. Other provisions help out family fishing firms. Finally, a whole series of tax measures help to strengthen small business, which is the real economic backbone of Quebec. The Bloc Québécois will obviously, therefore, support these measures.

In general, much still needs to be done, but we have a few steps here in the right direction and the Bloc Québécois will vote in favour of Bill C-28.

I would like, first, to describe the bill because it contains a host of provisions. It is important for the people listening to us to understand the full scope of what is in this bill. Basically, there are five main groups of provisions.

The first is a whole series of tax provisions for individuals. Here we find the tax credit for apprentices and tradespeople, an increase in the non-refundable credit for people receiving a pension, the establishment of a public transit tax credit, and an increase in the refundable credit for medical expenses. This first group is aimed, therefore, at individuals.

The second group extends benefits already given to farms to fishing firms as well. The fishing sector is in serious difficulty at the present time. These benefits are therefore very important to us, especially in regions such as the Gaspé, the Lower St. Lawrence and the North Shore. So as I was saying, the second group extends certain provisions previously available to farms to fishing firms as well.

There are various measures dealing with capital gains, the transfer of a business to other members of the family and agribusiness tax benefits.

A third main group of provisions in Bill C-28 has to do with various tax measures for businesses including, among others, the abolition of the surtax on the revenue of Canadian corporations and an increase in the amount a small or medium-sized business can earn if it wants to benefit from a tax credit.

A fourth series of legislative changes pertains to lowering the tax rate on capital gains of Canadian banks.

The last series of measures aims to lower the excise tax on the first 75,000 hectolitres of beer brewed in Canada in order to stimulate the growth of this sector and microbreweries in particular. This is an emerging sector that has had significant growth in recent years.

Government Orders

●(1250)

This sector has been growing in the regions also. For example, in the Joliette region, the Alchimiste microbrewery was experiencing difficulties because taxation by some of our European and American trading partners benefited their microbreweries. In the Canadian tax system, no distinction is made between a major brewery—such as Molson or Labatt—and microbreweries.

We will see that the minister has somewhat changed his tune from his initial announcement. It is interesting to note. We will all have the opportunity to comment on the reasons that led the minister to apply this measure not just to microbreweries but to breweries in general, as requested by the Standing Committee on Finance. The lower excise tax will also apply to major breweries as well.

I would now like to come back to the first series of measures: tax measures for individuals. The first measure for individuals introduced in this notice of ways and means and in Bill C-28 implements a mechanism allowing apprentices and tradespeople to deduct expenses for certain tools. Deductible expenses may not exceed \$1,000 or 5% of the apprentice's annual income, whichever is greater. It also allows tradespeople to deduct up to \$500 of the cost of certain tools.

Next, the bill implements indexation of the tax credit for apprentices and tradespeople. The maximum non-refundable credit for some people receiving pension income will double from \$1,000 to \$2,000. It also creates a \$1,000 non-refundable tax credit for employment income starting at \$250 for 2006 and increasing to \$1,000 in 2007.

It creates a non-refundable tax credit for public transit. To be eligible for the credit, taxpayers must supply a receipt or proof of purchase of a long-term public transit pass. Obviously, this does not apply to daily or weekly passes because we want to promote the use of public transit and relieve congestion on our roads. We could also have talked about meeting the Kyoto protocol targets or helping meet them, but because that word has become taboo for this government, we thought it best not to mention it.

This bill also creates a tax credit for textbooks of \$65 per month of full-time study and \$20 per month of part-time study. The refundable medical expense supplement will be increased from \$767 to \$1,000 and continue to be indexed to the cost of living. In addition, the bill will reduce the threshold for deducting medical expenses to the 2005 level. It will then continue to be indexed.

This first series of measures for individuals, some of which are better than others, aligns with what the Bloc Québécois has been proposing over the past few years.

The second group of provisions extends the same tax benefits currently enjoyed by fishing businesses to agricultural businesses as well. Thus, tax measures such as forward averaging when transferring a family business that includes agricultural capital property will also apply to fishing businesses.

The third group of provisions has to do with corporate taxation. The business limit under which Canadian and Quebec small and medium-sized businesses can seek a reduced income tax rate is being increased from \$300,000 to \$400,000. This will reduce the tax rate

for small and medium-sized business from 12% in 2007 to 11.5% in 2008 and 11% in 2009. This measure will allow small and medium sized businesses to generate the liquidity they need for future investments.

●(1255)

This bill will eliminate the 1.2% surtax targeted for Canadian controlled private corporations in 2008, with a subsequent reduction of 0.5% planned for corporate income tax in 2009 and 1% in 2010. As a result, this will translate into a corporate income tax reduction from 22.2% in 2006 to 19% in 2010. These measures should encourage investments, although a generalized tax reduction such as this does not automatically lead to increased investment, as we have learned in recent years.

The corporate tax rate was some 28% in the early 1990s, but has fallen to 22.2%. Despite that, the rate of investment last year was not as high as expected, and Canada has moved down in the ranks in terms of productivity. We are currently ranked 15th or 16th, although we ranked much higher just a few years ago.

These measures are necessary, but are not enough to ensure that the Canadian and Quebec economies regain their former productivity. This is important, as we all know, especially considering our aging population and the knowledge-based economy.

The fourth group of provisions amends the tax rate for banking institutions. A single tax rate will now be applied on the taxable capital surplus of financial institutions, and the threshold at which financial institutions start paying tax is being increased. Previously, banks were taxed according to a sliding scale. For example, corporations did not have to pay tax on surplus capital of \$0 to \$2 million. Between \$2 million and \$300 million, the tax rate was 1% and for higher amounts it was 1.25%.

The new legislation amends the tax scale whereby a 1.25% rate will apply when taxable capital exceeds \$1 billion. In future, we will have a uniform tax rate at a tax level that is quite interesting, especially for small and medium-sized banks, as I was saying.

The last group of provisions has to do with reducing excise duties on beer brewed in volumes up to 75,000 hectolitres. This new measure amends the Excise Tax Act and the Excise Act, 2001, by implementing a sliding scale based on the number of hectolitres brewed.

Government Orders

As I mentioned earlier, prior to this amendment all breweries, no matter the amount brewed, paid a fixed duty according to the volume of beer brewed. This new measure is favourable to microbreweries. In addition, and this is rather surprising, major breweries will also benefit from the reduction in excise tax payable on the first 75,000 hectolitres produced. I am almost certain that some of these major breweries exerted pressure on the government to have this measure apply across the board. Nevertheless, what is important to us is that it will benefit microbreweries and allow them to compete with American and European microbreweries in particular.

I would now like to comment on our position on these provisions. With regard to the first group, concerning taxation of individuals, as I mentioned, we have been calling for a tax credit for tradespeople's tools for some time. These workers often have to pay for their tools out of their own pockets even if employed by a garage or shop. It is quite a significant expense for them. In our opinion, this tax credit will be a tremendous help, particularly for apprentices who not only have to upgrade their tools but also purchase a basic set of tools.

The second measure pertains to public transit. I mentioned that a non-refundable tax credit is being proposed by the government. I have two comments in this regard. We would have preferred a refundable credit because quite often, people who use the bus, subway or public transit are not well off, do not pay income tax and thus cannot benefit from this measure. Consequently, we feel they could have gone one step further by providing a refundable tax credit.

Naturally, we do not believe that the overall number of users of public transit in Canada and Quebec will increase solely because of this measure. We need much more, particularly in light of the fiscal imbalance, to ensure that municipalities and transit commissions to have the necessary means to provide good service at affordable prices. Once again we support this measure in view of attaining the Kyoto targets.

What about the elderly and other segments of the population such as individuals receiving disability pensions, for whom these benefits represent their main source of income?

• (1300)

We in the Bloc Québécois have always maintained that older people should receive special treatment. Obviously, we would like to go much farther than that. Specifically, we are calling on the government, as we have done for a number of years, to ensure that all older people who qualify for the guaranteed income supplement receive it. A few years ago, we noticed that tens of thousands of people who were entitled to the supplement were not claiming it, because they did not know the program existed. Unfortunately, this is still true. At the time, Marcel Gagnon, the member for Champlain, travelled across Quebec. We were able to locate many people who did not think they qualified for this program. Unfortunately, many people still are unaware that they qualify.

As for the tax credit for textbooks, I repeat that we are not opposed to this measure, but we would have thought a refundable tax credit would be preferable, because students, especially full-time students, usually work only during the summer and therefore do not pay income tax, because they do not have sufficient income. They will therefore not benefit from this measure. I know that students can

carry this credit forward, but they are purchasing books now. It therefore would have been preferable to have it now.

I know that the Minister of Finance was interested in the suggestion my colleague from Jeanne-Le Ber made at a meeting of the Standing Committee on Finance to look into this. In my view, it should go further.

As well, we are calling for the abolition of the GST on books. Once again, this is vital for us, especially when we are talking about a knowledge-based economy.

Now, if we look into the second main group of provisions—new measures for fishing businesses—as I have mentioned, we are in favour of the new measure aimed at introducing the same types of forward tax averaging in the fishing industry as for farm businesses. However, we think that this benefit could have been more widely accessible. The measure proposed by the government applies to transfers between people in the same family. We think that the government could have gone further and extended the measure to intergenerational transfers outside the family.

As to the third series of provisions, corporate taxation, as I was saying, we fully support increasing the amount of revenue that would allow small and medium-sized businesses to have access to a lower tax rate. In fact, that was part of our 2000 election platform. The Bloc Québécois will stand up for measures that strengthen our SMEs, especially in Quebec, where the economy is made up of small and medium enterprises.

We are aware that competition exists among different countries and jurisdictions with respect to taxation. We must therefore also reduce the corporate surtax.

However, in the case of oil, there is no danger of relocation because companies cannot transfer the oil supply to China or Mexico. Therefore, we think it makes sense to maintain a surtax for oil companies and to abolish rapid amortization in the oil sands, where all investments can be written off in one year, instead of 25% per year, as is the case for conventional oil and gas. We think that is abusive.

I mentioned the fourth group of provisions, which has to do with taxation of banks. Obviously, the proposed measure benefits all banks, but it could also have an impact on the smaller banking institutions. I would like to remind the House that, as we have said in relation to Bill C-37, we have been trying for many years to increase competition in the banking sector, which is extremely concentrated. Five big banks control nearly all of the activity and do not really offer consumers any choice. The proposed measure will most likely have a positive impact in this respect. Let us hope it does.

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I would like to conclude by saying that we are very pleased with the measure to reduce the excise tax for microbreweries. I am certain that the entire microbrewery sector, particularly in Quebec, will benefit from this new measure. Might I remind the House that we have been asking—

• (1305)

[*English*]

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Assistant Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole, CPC): Questions and comments.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great fascination to my colleague's support for the budget, particularly in two areas. We follow with great interest the Conservatives' changing position on climate change. First, was that it did not exist, that it was something made up by the eco-freaks. Then we heard the theory that the last round of global warming was caused by dinosaur flatulence. Then they finally admitted there was some global warming, but we were not to worry, that a bus pass would stop the glaciers from melting. I believe that position was brought forward to Nairobi and was laughed out of the joint.

However, I am amazed that the members of the Bloc Québécois are now agreeing that the science of the Conservatives is exact, that thank God they have brought in a bus pass because it is going to stop global warming and go a long way toward achieving our Kyoto targets. The budget has trashed all the Kyoto targets, but the Bloc totally supports it.

The other thing I found interesting was our students getting a tax deduction to buy school books. I do not know what the students in his riding go through in terms of debt, but students in my riding rack up \$40,000 worth of debt. They come to southern Ontario from northern Ontario and spend four or five years going to university. Guess what? They fall in love and that gives them \$80,000 worth of debt with which to come home. The New Democrats feel we need a policy to lower student debt.

However, I am glad to see the Conservatives have an ally in the Bloc. It believes that getting a \$65 break on a text book is all students need. I guess I am somewhat flummoxed that this is the Bloc's position. On top of that, the other reason it supports a budget this bad is it helps microbreweries. I like beer as much as the next man, however, I did not think that was the basis of a national strategy or a budget.

Does my hon. colleague believe the budget really does do anything for Kyoto or is he just trying to prop the government up?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his question, but I would also like to clarify a few things. We supported the budget on May 2. Our leader was very clear about that. We supported the budget because the government promised to correct the fiscal imbalance as of the next budget. Last December 19, while he was on the campaign trail in Quebec, the Prime Minister promised to do so. We expect the Conservative government to correct the fiscal imbalance once and for all next February. By our calculations, it amounts to \$12 billion for all of Canada and \$3.9 billion for Quebec.

Of Quebec's \$3.9 billion, \$1.2 billion is for post-secondary education and social programs. The rest of Canada will be spending \$5 billion on those objectives. I would like to remind my colleague that university rectors, professors' associations and unions and student unions agree on those figures.

We are working to ensure that the education sector receives adequate financing and, within the next few weeks, we expect the Conservative government to agree to this request made by the Bloc Québécois and all education stakeholders.

That said, it is clear that, taken together, these measures do not do enough. Nevertheless, we believe that many of them are a step in the right direction.

• (1310)

[*English*]

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not quite understand how the Bloc would accept the budget, given the cut in 2007 of all funding that would create child care programs. My understanding is that Quebec is in line to receive, supposedly, over \$800 million for children. In Quebec many kids and families have been waiting for child care. Yes, there is a very good program there, however, the funding for child care is not enough. As a result of that, there is a very long waiting list. That is one area in the budget that I am sure parents and children in Quebec would not want the Bloc to support.

Also, there is no plan in the budget for municipal infrastructure debt. My understanding is there are billions dollars of infrastructure deficit in Quebec and outside Quebec as well. Many municipalities across the country are saying that their bridges, their water infrastructure, such as sewage, and their public transit are in desperate shape and they need a lot more funding from the federal government.

On the issue of student debt, students are graduating with over \$20,000 debt.

All these areas are important for children, for families, for young people and for municipalities and the budget does nothing for them. I do not quite understand how the Bloc could support it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I will reiterate what I said earlier. We supported the budget because of the promise to correct the fiscal imbalance. Through that correction, we will be able to support not only education and health care, but also Quebec's child care network. I would remind the House that it is not a public child care network. It consists of social economy enterprises often created by parents, and jointly managed by both the workers, primarily female workers, and parents. Out of the \$3.9 billion—the amount needed to correct the fiscal imbalance, according to the Bloc Québécois—\$270 million would serve as compensation for the Conservative government's unilateral decision to end the national child care program. We are also working on this.

Government Orders

As for loans and grants, and transfer payments for post-secondary education and social programs, I would remind the hon. member that we have a loans and grants system in Quebec. This means that our student debt problem is not as serious as it is in the rest of Canada. In that regard, what is important to us is that the fiscal imbalance be corrected in the next budget, which is why the Bloc Québécois supported the budget as a whole.

Now, a number of measures within Bill C-28 are a step in the right direction, but, unfortunately, as I said, this bill does not go far enough. For example, we called for all books to be exempt from the GST, as is the case in Quebec. There is no sales tax on books, because we want to promote Quebec culture and facilitate access to the documentation needed to really develop a knowledge based economy. We are therefore being entirely consistent. I am anxious to see if the NDP will display the same consistency over the coming months.

[English]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that the Bloc will vote for this troubled budget. However, is it true that the Bloc will not vote for the next budget if it does not get \$3.9 billion more for equalization?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, we will not vote in favour of the next budget if the fiscal imbalance is not corrected. We put the figure at \$12 billion for all of Canada and \$3.9 billion for Quebec. This essentially involves four things. First, we want to see a \$1.2 billion increase in the transfer payment for post-secondary education and social programs in Quebec. Second, we want the federal government to cover 25% of health costs. That translates into an additional \$400 million for Quebec. Then we want—and I mentioned this earlier—compensation for the unilateral decision by the Conservative government to end the Canada-wide child care program. Fourth, we want an equalization program that includes all the provinces and 100% of their revenue. We are talking about \$2.1 billion for Quebec. This is imperative to us. I am anxious to see what will happen on Friday, in Vancouver, during the meeting of the finance ministers, and whether this government will do the right thing. If not, then it better not count on our support next February or March.

• (1315)

[English]

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree with a lot of the member's comments. He dealt with the details in the budget and the positive aspects of it.

The member will know that the finance committee had a chance to study and spend some time on the oil sands in Alberta and get a clear understanding of the tremendous benefits they provided for both the province and the country. One of the things we talked about, and the member touched on it, was the accelerated capital cost allowance of machinery. That not only takes place in the oil sands in Alberta, but also in the mines in Quebec. If he is saying there should be less support, does he agree there is going to be less support for the mines and companies in Quebec?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows full well that we are in complete agreement with the principle of the accelerated capital cost allowance. However, I will say this: the Liberals amended tax rules with Bill C-48, with the result that mines have had their deductions for research and development and exploration expenses cut in exchange for reduced royalties. It is the same for the oil industry. The problem is that the provinces are getting practically no royalties from the mining sector. An undue advantage has been given to the oil industry, which has saved \$250 million in tax while the mines have had their benefits cut. We have to continue to work on promoting the development of the sector

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Resuming debate.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

[English]

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is our last opportunity to put on record the concerns of Canadians about the Conservatives' budget. It is very important to realize that today we are talking about the last stage, the final touches of the first budget the Conservatives brought in following the election. A lot of water has flowed under the bridge since that time. One would think from listening to today's debate, especially after listening to the Bloc, that we are dealing with a very specific set of tax credits that would benefit people and therefore what do we have to complain about.

Mr. Mike Wallace: That is correct.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: My colleague the member for Burlington said that is correct.

It is more important than ever for us to tell Canadians what the Conservatives want us to pass today. They want Bill C-28 to get through the House, into the Senate, and then to receive royal assent so all is finished and done.

Today we are deciding on whether or not the Conservative budget should be given any kind of support and treated with any sense of credibility and integrity.

I remind members and all Canadians who are watching that we are dealing with a budget that was an absolute missed opportunity for the vast majority of Canadians who are struggling to make a living. Canadians want to provide for themselves and their families. They want to contribute to this great country. They have much to offer by way of talent, energy and expertise but are being denied from doing so because of the regressive and repressive policies of the current government, and the governments before it, that keep working families down, that do not lift them up and encourage them to contribute.

This holiday season it is more apparent than ever what kind of a Canada the Conservatives and the Liberals together are creating. It is important for us to remind Canadians that there is an alternative, that there is hope, that there are other ways to approach the way budgets are done and the way this country is ruled and regulated.

Government Orders

The New Democratic Party has always said when it comes to budgets that they are a road map. They are an indication of where a government wants the country to go. We look at this budget in terms of how it would build a better future for everyone in our society.

We have always said it must be a balanced approach. We are not here to suggest all extra revenues should go into spending programs. We are not here to suggest there should never ever be a tax cut to anyone in our society. Nor are we here to suggest that no money should go against the debt. We are here to say that a good budget, one which we were hoping the Conservatives would have brought in, would actually balance those competing demands and would ensure that all areas were recognized and treated responsibly. That means addressing the shortfall in those programs that actually help people make a difference. It means redressing the 13 years of the tightfisted, budget cutting, meanspirited ways of the Liberals.

A good budget would ensure that a portion of any surplus, not all of it, not the whole kit and caboodle, but a portion of it went against the debt.

A good budget would look at the income distribution in this country, at which groups are trying to make ends meet, and ensure that where possible some tax relief went in the direction of people who need it the most.

● (1320)

What did we get with Bill C-28? A budget that basically ignored all of the needs of Canadians in terms of health care, child care, housing and the environment. It gave more tax breaks to the wealthy and big corporations, and in the aftermath of the budget the government put every penny that was left in terms of surplus against the debt.

Canadians did not get the balance they were looking for. They did not get the good government they thought they were getting when the Conservatives were lucky enough to form the government of this country. Much as Canadians are very skeptical about Conservatives, after 13 years of Liberal rule, they were certainly looking forward to some sort of change and had some optimism about the future, but they were sorely disappointed. We have to continue to find ways to address those concerns.

Let me also say that since this budget, as I mentioned at the outset, a lot of water has flowed under the bridge, lots and lots of water. Included in the list of things that have flowed under the bridge is \$1 billion worth of cutbacks that have hurt Canadians in very many ways. It is something that has to be addressed in this context because we are talking about a budget and we are talking about the future.

When the Conservatives had a chance to redress some of the wrongs of the Liberals, to right things and to bring balance, they chose to follow the Liberal path of letting the surplus build up, not announcing it and dealing with it before the final days of the end of the fiscal year. Consequently they put \$13 billion against the debt and at the same time cut \$1 billion out of programs and important areas for Canadians. I want to reference a couple of them, because we need to go back and persuade the Conservatives to right a few wrongs.

The first has to do with literacy. As I have said over and over again, how could a government, if it is concerned about giving

people the tools they need to contribute to this economy, cut the very ground out from under those people? How could it destroy the very things Canadians need in order to gain the skills to participate fully in this world?

Time and time again, the Conservatives have suggested that the cutbacks to literacy were all administrative.

Mr. Mike Wallace: It is true.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: The member for Burlington said it is true. Unfortunately, he has been given a bill of goods by the human resources minister, because it is absolutely not true. The government has proceeded to cut the heart and soul out of programs that actually deliver services to Canadians.

I want to reference about 200 letters, all of them handwritten, from individuals who have benefited from programs that provide literacy and numeracy training. I want to read a couple of them so that my friend from Burlington and his colleagues will have a better appreciation of just how hard people are being hit by the Conservatives' actions.

In this first letter, the writer is referring to the Luxton adult learning program.

This program (the Luxton Adult Learning Program) means that I am able to keep my job at the Health Sciences Centre in Winnipeg. In August 2004, I was granted the privilege of an interview after many years of trying to gain employment into their many different medical secretary fields. I attended the University of Manitoba and Herzing Career College as a mature student. After searching for years on Winnipeg's adult literacy programs, I found the Luxton Adult Literacy Program. It was the right and beneficial program for me. Let me explain.

After graduating with a diploma in hand from Herzing Career College in 1986, I worked for sole proprietors, small clinics and the Misericordia General Hospital. I did not need my grade 12 or the GED program at that time. Therefore, the Luxton Adult Learning Program was not a concern to me....

Life hardships and experiences played the role of hindering my success at obtaining employment at the Health Sciences Centre....

The environment is at a children's school, and the instructors are mature adults like myself and other students. Every student comes into the program for their own private reasons, which are kept confidential....Every student learns at their own pace of learning....It is a secure, safe environment and offers a professional environment to learn. Most every student feels the same way.

This person accessed the adult literacy program at a school in my riding. As a result of that, she was able to go on and get a job, secure employment, and gain the confidence to participate in all kinds of ways offered by our society, which had been denied to her up until that point.

● (1325)

Many others have expressed the same thing. Here is one from April:

I am in this program for my reading, writing, spelling and math. I am doing good on all of it but I hope to get better on all of it. If this program was not here I would feel bad because I need the help I am getting in this program. I need the program to help me on all the things I need help on.

Let me read a couple more:

Government Orders

My name is Elsie and I am nineteen years old and I'm writing this letter to you because I want you to know what it means to me to come back to school. When I was a young teenager in high school I had a hard time. I didn't have many friends and a lot of people there were so mean to me they would tease me and bully me around all the time. It got to me to the point that I just dropped out. I thought that it would be ok for me not to have the education that I should have had when I was younger, but one day I tried to get a job and I was told that I didn't have the education that was required for that job. So that's when it hit me that I needed education. If it wasn't for the program Literacy, upgrading, and the funding from the government, then I don't know what I would do. It means a lot for people like me to be able to come back to school and be able to get the education that we need. I feel a lot better knowing that I can get the education that I need. I feel like a new person and that I would be able to get a good job and have a stable home for my family.

I could go on. There are hundreds of those letters, all written personally. They are all real stories of real people who are being hurt by the government's cutbacks.

If there is anything I could do today at this time of dealing with budget matters it would be to try to persuade the Conservative government to go back and look at what its cuts to literacy programs actually meant and did. If there was administrative stuff that could be cut out of the program, so be it. The member for Burlington does not seem to get that what the government did was not just cut extras and things that were not about direct services; it cut into the very heart and soul of programs that helped people help themselves.

Another good example is in the area of women's funding and women's programming. The Conservatives said that they are cutting away any extra administrative costs, that they are taking the money that was going into administration and putting it in the hands of people, into the hands of women.

In reality, that is a good cover for a cutback that is directed at an important group in our society who should be fully participating and cannot because of systemic discrimination and a whole variety of factors. They are not people who want a handout from the government. They want to access these programs that help them to become full participants in our society. That is what is wrong with the cutbacks in the Status of Women file.

It is ridiculous for the minister, as she did yesterday when the huge demonstrations took place, to suggest that she is not hurting women. She is hurting women. The government is hurting women's groups that are providing services to help women deal with some very difficult situations.

I think about my own riding of Winnipeg North. The North End Women's Centre has done so many projects to help women who are at the very bottom and are almost giving up completely. The centre helps them get on their feet and start again. One of those projects is Money & Women, to help women get ID so that they can access a credit union or a bank. It helps women figure out how they can avoid being ripped off by payday lenders. That is an important service.

Why does the government continue to cut back the heart and soul of this country in terms of our values of caring and compassion?

I want to touch on an issue that was part of this budget and it is the money that was gleaned out of the system by the NDP when the Liberals were in power in their minority year. It is money that was approved by Parliament for education, housing and the environment.

While we have been going through this debate, the Conservatives have taken great delight in all this money they are expending in these

areas, without mentioning that the money that has been put in those areas is the money that happened as a result of NDP pressure during the Liberal minority government.

● (1330)

The only new money in this budget for education and housing is a result of the bit of money we were able to win from Parliament as a result of the minority situation. We expected that money to not only flow, which the Conservatives allowed to happen, but we also expected that there would have been something in addition, that the Conservatives would want to build on those initiatives which actually help people access important programs that make a difference, whether it be education services or affordable housing.

Let us be clear that what we need to do is not simply take credit for other people's hard work. I do not care who gets the credit for this, but the Conservatives should not simply sit back, say they have put money into trust funds and now they can rest on their laurels and not do anything. The fact of the matter is there are many communities that are desperately in need of some support, particularly in the area of housing. It makes no sense to anyone why the government would simply take that money, put it in a trust fund, wash its hands of it and say it is over.

I can reference a local situation. Folks in the House will know about Gilbert Park, a housing project in northwest Winnipeg which was on the news very recently. A fire was started by young kids who tried to put a child with a disability into the burning building. It made the news. The community is working hard to overcome some very difficult situations, but it really needs a federal government that is willing to partner with it to renovate the houses people live in and build the kind of community that will prevent that kind of delinquency on the part of young people.

We are talking about a housing project where almost 50% of the population is under the age of 18. Can anyone imagine? This is a community that is living in almost abject poverty and half of the population is kids. There is no money for crime prevention programs, cultural programs or women's program because the government, like the government before it, believes that if it gives more tax breaks to corporations and the wealthy it will trickle down and somehow, somewhere Gilbert Park will reap the benefits. It does not work that way. It just does not happen. It defies all logic and has no basis in fact whatsoever.

We need a government that balances the need to be fiscally responsible by ensuring every year some money goes against the debt. That we support. We need a government that is willing to take some of the surplus dollars and put them into communities and programs that actually help people overcome problems, many of which are beyond their own individual responsibility and control.

That is the role of government in the final analysis. That is the essence of what we are here for. We are here to ensure that people are given the supports they need to help themselves. If we fail that, then we have misunderstood our responsibilities, we have denied Canadians their right to access a good parliamentary process, and we will have in fact only ensured that we are negligent in the final analysis.

Government Orders

It may be too late to stop this bill given the fact that the Bloc are supporting the Conservatives, but I would urge the government to look at real people, real issues and the reality of Canadians, and start to turn these situations around.

● (1335)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the tax credits in this second act on the budget has to do with public transit passes. This is an issue which has been linked somewhat to the whole idea of reducing harmful emissions into the air and get more people using the transit system.

Since the member is on the finance committee, I wonder if she can tell the House whether or not there was an objective analysis or appraisal of the potential effectiveness under Treasury Board guidelines. A program would be in violation of those guidelines if it does not have a reasonable prospect of being successful in achieving its objectives.

It would appear to me that the tax credit will certainly benefit all of the people who currently buy transit passes, but very small numbers of people would take out transit passes. Even then, it would appear that many of our major urban transit systems have infrastructure deficiencies right now which will require substantial investments to expand the system to be able to get any kind of reasonable expansion to handle any more passengers in any event.

I wonder if the member could advise the House if there was any insight into the potential effectiveness of this transit pass credit.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Mr. Speaker, the bill is replete with numerous tax credits all of which probably offer a little benefit to some people and certainly they are not to be dismissed as insignificant. However, the member makes a good point in terms of whether or not the appropriate work was done to ensure the proper formulation of this program.

I want to remind the member though that all us in the House on numerous occasions have debated, discussed and approved the idea of a credit for using public transportation. We certainly support the idea.

We have real concerns with a government that focuses only on these kinds of tax credits and does not really look at the bigger picture. My colleague who just spoke before me was quite right when he asked how anybody could think that this measure was going solve the problems of Kyoto or climate change. We need a much broader approach and that is something that the Conservatives are unwilling to do.

Let me say one more thing on this issue. There is always a need to ensure that whatever tax breaks are given a solid analysis is done and the decisions are made on a cost benefit basis. We have found on numerous occasions that it never seems to apply when we are talking about wealthy Canadians or large corporations.

During the process at finance committee around Bill C-28 and before that around the prebudget consultations, we tried very hard to get a cost benefit analysis done of all tax breaks to gas companies and oil companies who are involved in the non-renewable area. We could not get the government to agree to that. Nor could we get the Liberals to support that initiative.

● (1340)

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are fewer children in Canada. The annual number of births in Canada decreased by 14% between 1994 and 2003. Back then there were 4 million kids. Now it has dropped to 3.4 million kids under 10. There is severe shortage of regulated child care spaces in Canada. Over 2.2 million kids are placed in unregulated care each day.

Because of the way Canada is treating its kids, many families are living below the poverty line, which is \$15,000 per year. In fact, there are 1.2 million kids living in poverty. No wonder. Canada devotes over 5% of GDP to social programs and our child poverty rate is almost 15%. Therefore, we know that there are missed opportunities for children and there are missed opportunities for our young people as well in this budget.

Researchers studying youth between the ages of 10 and 18 over an eight year period found that those who live in smoggy communities were nearly five times more likely to have clinically low lung function compared to teens living in low pollution areas. What would the NDP do for children and youth?

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate the question because when it comes to Bill C-28 and the federal Conservative budget of May 2006, this budget misses the mark totally when it comes to addressing the needs of children and youth.

In fact, under this budget that we are now wrapping up here today, child care wait lists will go up and more parents who are trying to juggle work and family responsibilities will be left with a very untenable situation by putting their children into unregulated child care environments. Nothing the Conservatives have done will address this very serious issue and we are only creating huge problems down the road by neglecting this urgent situation right now.

It is important to note that many in the House really do believe that we have to invest in child care spaces in a program that ensures quality of care for our children, our most precious resource. It is not good enough to simply say we are giving a little bit of money to parents with children under the age of six because that money does not buy the spaces that they need and want. It does not ensure that they will be able to put their kids in a safe protected environment with good quality care.

Most people in this country want to do their best, want to make a contribution. We have talented people willing to work to grow our economy, but they really need to know that our government cares as much about children as it does about paying off the fiscal debt or giving tax cuts to corporations. The government really needs to get a signal that children are the most valuable part of our whole society.

First of all, we would continue to work with the child care community to get an appropriate number of spaces every year. Second, the government should stop the cutbacks that just happened in terms of the youth career placement program. It is through that avenue that we are able to help students and young people get the experience and exposure they need to go on to pursue education and jobs that benefit all of us in the long run.

Government Orders

• (1345)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to give the member a chance to comment at more length on the reprehensible cuts to: women's programs, Status of Women's offices, court challenges program, Law Reform Commission, museums, literacy, summer students, volunteers, tourism, aboriginal people, greenhouse gas cutting programs, child care and Kelowna. I know the budget will pass because of the Bloc, but we just cannot speak enough about these reprehensible cuts.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Mr. Speaker, they are reprehensible cuts and one of my colleagues on the Conservative benches said they are meanspirited. A Conservative said that. Yes, they are meanspirited and they are reprehensible, but most of all, they do not make sense from a cost benefit point of view.

Conservatives seem so keen on making sure that everything is fiscally responsible that they are cutting off their noses to spite their faces. They are cutting off programs that help people earn a living, pay taxes and help grow our economy. They are keeping people out of the workforce that want to be in the workforce. They are denying young people opportunities. They are even taking away the opportunity for people to volunteer in our society. Does that make sense?

In the past when it came to women's cuts, I suggested, and I got howled at from the Conservative benches, that they wanted women to be at home, barefoot, pregnant and in the kitchen.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: See, they are howling again. Let me finish by saying, and it is journalists who will say it: pregnant and barefoot in the kitchen, a Tory woman. Now, Mr. Speaker—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order. The time for questions and comments has expired.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Mississauga South.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-28, which is the second bill to implement certain budget provisions.

What concerns me is the government is not speaking to its own bill. A budget is important to Canadians and there are many important provisions in the legislation. A lot of work has gone into it. It is as if there is no need for the government to explain to Canadians what happened as it went through committee, when various witnesses were heard. Surely, some witnesses must have had some input into the various provisions.

Let me remind hon. members about some of the proposals in this second bill to implement certain provisions of the budget.

One of the proposals is the new Canada employment credit. I wonder if there was any questions about whether anybody would slip through the cracks. All of a sudden we have an income tax system which has some principle and some balance to it. It is a progressive tax system where the ability to pay is taken into account. We understand that some Canadians do not even make enough money to pay any income tax.

Another proposal in the legislation is the textbook tax credit. I do not know whether there will be any input with respect to this.

With regard to the transit pass tax credit, I have to wonder if there was any input on this. This credit is linked to the whole issue of our environmental policy with respect to greenhouse gases, smog emissions and the like and to get people to be more cognizant of their options to make a contribution. Individuals have a contribution to make. The Conservatives have not risen to reinforce why they think this proposal is one of the best ways to go and what it adds in terms of the whole scheme of our environmental policy.

What about the new deduction of tool expenses for tradespeople? Who is left out with respect to this deduction? I know some people have been left out because they do not qualify under the definitions. Did they go before committee?

How can we make an informed decision and vote on a bill if members do not defend it and show how the budget and the budget bill address the needs of the most number of Canadians possible?

There is also the exemption for scholarship income received in connection with enrolment in an institution, which qualifies a student for the education tax credit. How many people qualify for that exemption? What else has been done to ensure that those who cannot afford to go to university get to go? I understand it is important to promote excellence, but have we also balanced the need to promote access and affordability?

Another proposal in the legislation is the children's fitness tax credit. I do not know very much about it. It is a modest amount. I am not sure whether there were some concerns about it.

With respect to the pension income credit, the government has subsequently come up with a scheme of pension splitting. This will help certain Canadians. Canadians with a pension income in excess of about \$35,600 will be able to split with a partner or a spouse who has less income. However, it does nothing for people with a pension income of less than \$35,600. This does nothing for people who do not have a partner.

We are shifting the burden of taxation here and I am not sure of the objective of the government. I have not heard from any Conservatives. They have not spoken to the bill. They have not explained why these things are happening. They have not told Canadians their vision. How do the Conservatives see this unfolding? I cannot explain it.

Another proposal in the bill is the extension of the \$500,000 lifetime capital gains exemption and various intergenerational rollovers to fishers. I certainly understand this proposal with respect to the fishery because it is a very important area. I would have hoped somebody from the Conservatives would have spoken about why this was necessary, why the extension of the exemption, and how it translated into meeting the objectives of the Government of Canada on behalf of Canadians, particularly in this sector.

Statements by Members

● (1350)

We also have the apprenticeship job creation tax credit. Apprenticeship training has been a priority of every government since I have been here. It is extremely important, but I do not know whether we have done enough on the apprenticeship side. I would have hoped somebody from the Conservative government would have made the case on behalf of those who were seeking to build on their skills so they could be contributing members to society. We did not hear any of that, and I am not sure why.

We have the reduction in the current 12% small business tax rate from 11.5% for 2008 to 11% thereafter. I am not sure whether Canadians understand what a small business is compared to another type of business. However, we do know one thing. Historically, small businesses have contributed to employment growth at a much greater rate than non-small businesses. How will this translate? Are there benchmarks and targets and what does it do for small business either in reinvestment or in further expansion and job creation? Those are important issues to Canadians. Not one Conservative stood and talked about why this was important, how it translated in terms of the vision for Canadians for economic growth, sustainable development and other issues. No interest whatsoever was expressed by Conservative members, and I do not understand it.

We also have the increase to \$400,000 from \$300,000 of the amount that a small business can earn at a small business tax rate effective January 1, 2007. As a chartered accountant, I know the \$300,000 was there a long time ago. We have the magnitude of dollars, the expansion of businesses and start-up costs for businesses. The ability to get a sustainable business going is important.

I am concerned about what is not in this budget bill nor the first one, and that is new dollars for the health care wait times guarantee. It was one of the five promises in the throne speech of the government. In today's media Canadians will be able to read how the minister said that we were operating in a vacuum, that they had no idea how it worked and how to get there, but they would study it and maybe figure it out. How can they make a promise during the election campaign to do something about which they have no idea? That is totally irresponsible.

It is about time some Conservative members stood in this place, spoke about the budget and stood the test of scrutiny of questioning by hon. members of other parties to ensure they know what they are talking about. There is no evidence of that right now.

● (1355)

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for that eloquent presentation.

As my colleague has said—and as we can see—the budget does present problems. I would like my colleague to elaborate. There is a difference between bringing down a budget and making drastic cuts that affect the neediest members of our society a few months later. Could our colleague tell us whether, when the budget was brought down, Canadians had reason to expect cuts in the programs the most vulnerable Canadians needed most? Could he tell us whether or not the government concealed things from Canadians when it tabled its

budget? Did we see the true face of the Conservative government when the budget was tabled?

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, there is no mention in the budgets of the cuts that were made. The government seems to be making cuts on the fly. We have seen massive cuts to literacy, women's programs and the courts challenges program. Twelve of sixteen regional offices of Status of Women are now scheduled to be closed.

All of a sudden hundreds of millions of dollars have been cut. Were they disclosed to Canadians in the budget? Were they disclosed to Canadians during the election campaign? Did the Conservatives disclose their vision, that this was where they would go, that they would dismantle all the things that helped people who were least likely to vote Conservative? That seems to be the only criteria here, to ensure that they help those who are most likely to vote Conservative.

The government is governing on the basis of ideology, not on a basis of a vision for Canada. I do not understand this, but Canadians understand it. They understand that the government is making promises that it does not keep, whether it be income trusts or anything like that. Shame on the government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: On division.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed)

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS*[English]***SUSAN MALCOLM**

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to Susan Malcolm from Brantford, a terrific woman who was tragically killed in a motor vehicle accident recently.

To know Susan was to like her. Indeed, if a person did not like Susan Malcolm, then that person was incapable of liking a fellow human being.

Susan tremendously enjoyed the life which she shared with her husband, Scott. Together, they raised three children of whom they were justifiably very proud, Hunter, Emily and Robert.

Susan was a highly respected teacher and positively touched the lives of thousands of students who came into contact with her during her lengthy teaching career. She was always positive, never cynical, always looked for and spoke of the good in other persons and was not judgmental.

Statements by Members

About her, it can sincerely and truthfully be said: "Let us be grateful for people who make us happy; they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom".

Susan Malcolm brought happiness to the lives of many, particularly her family, and made many souls blossom. She fought the good fight and is gone to her just reward.

* * *

● (1400)

SALVATION ARMY KETTLE

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, next Saturday, I will do my annual shift for the Salvation Army Kettle. I invite all Canadians to honour the true meaning of Christmas through the charity of their choice.

There are many children right here in Canada who need our help over this time of year. These children will not share in the joy of waking up on Christmas morning to a gift under the tree without our help. Whether we add one more gift to our shopping list or donate an extra \$5 to the Salvation Army Kettle, it will mean so much to a child. Please give generously to our less fortunate children.

Let me also take this opportunity to wish you, Mr. Speaker, the constituents of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo and all members in the House a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

* * *

[*Translation*]

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Yesterday was International Human Rights Day. In 1950, the General Assembly of the United Nations invited all states and international organizations to observe International Human Rights Day on December 10 of each year.

I would like to take this opportunity to quote from article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages".

I call on the Conservative government to reverse its decision to slash the budget for literacy organizations in light of the fact that many people in Quebec have a great deal of difficulty reading and writing.

The Bloc Québécois believes that this decision indicates a lack of respect for the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

* * *

[*English*]

COCHLEAR IMPLANT PROGRAM

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Sick Children's Hospital, in particular its cochlear implant program, which is second to none in the world and which has been doing miracles for children across the country.

My oldest daughter has a severe hearing loss. She has fought her whole life just to be able to participate in the most casual of

conversations. When she was 17, she came home from school and said, "Dad, I don't want to be deaf any more". She went online and learned about the cochlear implant program. She contacted the hospital herself. Within three hours of her email being sent, we received a phone call.

From that moment on, Dr. Papsin, Patricia Fuller and Mary-Lynn Feness kicked into action. She was quickly assessed, she received her operation and she went through phenomenal post-op care. That operation has turned her life around.

All too often we hear from the enemies of public health care, but Sick Kids is a symbol for which we need to fight. The cochlear implant program is based on the principle that any child, no matter what the ability of their parents to pay, has the right to the best health care in this world.

I want to thank them very much.

* * *

GOVERNMENT OF ONTARIO

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a recent report from the Rotman School of Management has concluded that the Ontario economy is slowing down because the McGuinty government is failing to implement sound economic strategies. In contrast, the report recognizes that the Prime Minister and the finance minister are committed to improving the productivity and prosperity of Canadians.

Sadly, and contrary to the report recommendations, it would appear that Premier Dalton McGuinty has decided to follow the blueprint designed by former premier Bob Rae.

Premier McGuinty inherited the hottest economy in the G-8 and has rendered it the fourth best economy in Canada. While the era of accountability has officially begun in Ottawa, lavish, wasteful, ad hoc spending is quickly becoming the trademark of the tax and spend McGuinty government.

If Premier McGuinty wants to bring back the Rae days, it would appear he is on track. If he wants to restore the economy, I would suggest he listen to the Rotman School of Management and read "Advantage Canada".

* * *

[*Translation*]

CITÉ-DES-JEUNES A.M. SORMANY SCHOOL

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on November 14, I met with a group of students from Cité-des-Jeunes A.M. Sormany high school in Edmundston to talk about my role as member of Parliament and also about the government's role.

I always find these meetings enjoyable as they are an opportunity to talk to students about issues of interest to them and also to share with them my experience as a parliamentarian.

The questions asked by these students were extremely relevant and I am convinced that such meetings should take place more often in order to increase the interest of our Canadian students in politics.

Statements by Members

I was also pleased to see the level of opposition to the recent cuts announced by the Conservative government. The students want to take action and be heard in order to prevent the elimination of programs important to them.

These students are the leaders of the future and that is why I take every possible opportunity to meet such groups in our schools.

Before this House, I would like to thank all the students as well as the teacher, Sylvie Cyr, for inviting me to their class. I hope the experience was as rewarding for them as it was for me.

* * *

• (1405)

[*English*]

DAVISON SCHOOL

Mr. Garry Breitzkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, each Christmas Eve, the children of Holten, a community in the Netherlands, place candles on the graves of Canadian soldiers who died in that country. After hearing of the Dutch children's display of kindness toward Canada, Mr. Randy Albers, a teacher at Davison School in Melville, Saskatchewan, coordinated a project to say "thank you" to the children of Holland.

Following much planning and fundraising, the Davison School students have created medallions made of specially minted 2005 nickels commemorating the victory of 1945 and the liberation of Europe. Through our Canadian foreign affairs department, I ensured that the necklaces would be in the hands of the Canadian embassy in the Hague in time to be presented to the children of Holten before this year's Christmas Eve ceremony.

On behalf of the Government of Canada, I would like to commend and congratulate Randy Albers, the Davison School students, staff and volunteers for reaching across borders and oceans to say "thank you".

* * *

[*Translation*]

FOOD PRICES

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a recently released study comparing the cost of food in northern and southern Quebec found that there is a dramatic difference: a \$1 food item in the south costs \$1.57 in the north.

Costs are too high for the Inuit. Foods that are part of a healthy diet, such as milk, flour and potatoes, cost twice as much as they do in the south.

The Department of Indian and Northern Affairs is currently financing a pilot project in conjunction with the food mail program. This pilot project reduces the cost of mailing healthful perishable foods from 80¢ to 30¢ per kilo. However, only three northern communities currently benefit from this pilot project.

This program has proven its worth because, in addition to reducing the cost of food, it improves the quality and variety of food available.

The Conservative government must make the necessary resources available to make this pilot project permanent and offer it to all 145 northern communities. The Inuit have the right to a healthy diet, which is essential for good health.

* * *

LUNG ASSOCIATION CHRISTMAS SEAL CAMPAIGN

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform the House that December is the Lung Association's Christmas seal campaign month.

In Canada, over three million people suffer from serious lung conditions. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, which chronically restricts the supply of air to the lungs, is the fourth leading cause of death in Canada.

Our clean air act will help prevent lung diseases.

Our government is concerned about how lung diseases affect Canadians and has been collaborating with the Lung Association on various programs for a long time. We intend to keep working with them to reach our common goal: improving pulmonary health.

I therefore urge all of my colleagues to support the 2006 Christmas seals campaign during the month of December.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and merry Christmas.

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[*English*]

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize two outstanding organizations in Beaches—East York. Alex Winch of Mondial Energy has teamed up with Neighbourhood Link and Senior Link to build the city of Toronto's largest array of solar panels at a seniors housing complex on Coatsworth Crescent.

The solar panels, which powered up on November 25, will provide much of the hot water for the building, providing major savings and reducing greenhouse gases.

Winch's Mondial Energy Inc. will earn steady profits for investors, while at the same time reducing an estimated 40 tonnes of hydrocarbon emissions from the atmosphere each year.

The Coatsworth project is the biggest in Toronto so far and two more Neighbourhood Link projects are also in the early stages in the Beaches.

I congratulate Alex Winch, Mondial Energy, Neighbourhood Link and Senior Link and for their leadership in assisting with the cost of housing in Toronto and their effort to help reduce greenhouse gases. Their work is truly commendable.

*Statements by Members***ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to note today the recent initialling of two landmark final agreements with first nations in British Columbia.

Like the Nisga'a treaty before them, these agreements set the foundation for economic growth and prosperity for first nations and for neighbouring communities as well. These agreements are real, tangible proof that the process is working and that with patience, determination and compromise, we can reach agreements that benefit not only first nations but all Canadians.

I would like to congratulate the federal, provincial and first nations negotiators on these remarkable achievements. Once these agreements are ratified, they will balance the first nations' rights with the interests of third parties and all Canadians. The treaties will provide clarity about the aboriginal rights of the first nations and provide certainty over ownership and use of land and resources in the province of British Columbia.

I am looking forward to the conclusion of more agreements with first nations in British Columbia and, indeed, all across this nation. It is through initiatives such as these, working with our provincial and first nations partners, we can ensure a brighter future for first nations and a more prosperous future for Canadians.

* * *

• (1410)

RCMP

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while last week's resignation of Commissioner Zaccardelli helped to remove some of the tarnish on the RCMP's image, it did little to put the matter of the Arar affair to rest and little to address the concerns of the other three Canadians falsely deported and tortured.

On the eve of the release of Justice O'Connor's second report, will the new government act to address this issue?

I earlier asked the commissioner to conduct investigations into the leaks but that they be done by independent persons. He refused to do that. We call once again on the government to initiate those independent investigations to get to the bottom of the leaks that so damaged Mr. Arar.

The government must act to create a parliamentary committee to oversee our security intelligence activities. We continue to hear of anecdotal evidence of people being detained improperly based on false accusations, some of which are coming from our intelligence agencies. We must ensure that what happened to Messrs. Arar, Al Malki, El Maati and Nureddin does not happen to other Canadians.

The new government should do what the previous Liberal government failed to do, issue an apology to Mr. Arar and—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River.

CANADIAN CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

Mr. Gary Merasty (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada is the home of the just society, a noble vision that affirms the rights of Canadians, including the rights of minorities and the most vulnerable.

We have seen the terrible cost of ignoring basic human rights, such as the internment of Ukrainian Canadians in World War I, and the injustices of the residential school system.

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms is an enduring solemn oath to Canada. These historical abuses and shames must never happen again. The courts safeguarded these charter rights and freedoms, which are sacred to all Canadians.

The charter and the courts have protected many, including in Eldridge where deaf Canadians were found to have a right to sign language interpretation to avoid medical misdiagnosis; in Wu, which determined that imprisonment should not result simply because someone is too poor to pay a fine; in Williams, which found that an accused has a right to be judged free of racial bias; and in Mills, which asserted that victims of sexual assault have a right to maintain their privacy.

All court affirmed charter rights promote the vision of the just society and it is our duty as members of Parliament to respect diversity and maintain the rule of law.

* * *

[*Translation*]

AUGUSTO PINOCHET

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Augusto Pinochet, the former Chilean dictator, died yesterday. He overthrew the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende on September 11, 1973, in a coup d'état. His 17 years in power were marked by a merciless battle against the democratic aspirations of Chile, resulting in over 3,000 political assassinations and 1,000 disappearances.

During those difficult years, Quebec welcomed many Chilean exiles. We supported our South American companions who fought for greater social justice, democracy and respect for human rights.

Pinochet died without justice being served. We regret that he was not judged for his past actions.

The Bloc Québécois is not shedding any tears over Pinochet's death and, on this day, we would like to say that we grieve for all the victims of that regime.

Oral Questions

[English]

GRAMMY AWARDS

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, the 49th annual Grammy Award nominees were announced in Hollywood, California. Nominated for best country song and song of the year was *Jesus, Take the Wheel*, co-written by Gordie Sampson of Big Pond, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia.

The song was inspired by the tragic death of an acquaintance of Gordie's who died in a car accident back in Nova Scotia. Sung by Carrie Underwood, it spent six weeks on top of the Billboard music charts and has won a long list of awards, including song of the year from the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers, and song of the year from the Academy of Country Music Awards.

An accomplished singer, songwriter and producer with a shelf full of awards from the CCMA and the ECMA, Gordie has written for many of the most accomplished country and folk singers from both sides of the border, including Faith Hill, Keith Urban, LeAnn Rimes and Great Big Sea.

On February 11 in Hollywood, the Grammy winners will be announced, but no matter what the outcome, Gordie has demonstrated immense talent and has made all Cape Bretoners, Nova Scotians and, indeed, Canadians proud of his achievements. I wish Gordie good luck.

* * *

●(1415)

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Sunday, December 10, we celebrated International Human Rights Day. I will remind the House that December 10 also marks the 25th anniversary of Canada's ratification of the UN Convention on Discrimination Against Women.

Since our government took office, the fight on discrimination against women has been ramped up. Our Minister of Indian Affairs is fighting for aboriginal women by dealing with matrimonial property rights. Our Minister of Health has introduced wait times for prenatal aboriginal women. Our Minister of Justice is protecting our young women from sexual predators.

Our Minister of Citizenship and Immigration is protecting victims of human trafficking. Overseas, our Minister of International Cooperation is dedicating \$45 million to UNICEF to provide medical treatment to mothers and their children in Bangladesh.

Finally, our Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women is putting \$5 million more into women's programming in 2007.

That is how our government fights discrimination against women.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

RCMP COMMISSIONER

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Prime Minister said he did not know in advance that the commissioner was going to change his story. However, we know that the government had a letter from the commissioner dated November 2.

We know that the commissioner has said he spoke about this in advance with the Minister of Public Safety.

And now, the government has prohibited two senior officials close to the Prime Minister from testifying before the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

When did the Prime Minister learn that the Commissioner of the RCMP would be changing his story?

What is the Prime Minister trying to hide?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has already answered these questions and has not prohibited anyone from testifying before the parliamentary committee.

[English]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like the Prime Minister to answer the question: when did he learn of the change in the version of the facts? He is avoiding the question all the time.

These two senior officials are very close to him. They briefed the commissioner before his testimony in September. Now these two officials are refusing to appear before the standing committee. We need to know what the Prime Minister is trying to hide.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we made our answers to these questions clear last week. We learned, of course, at the same time as everybody else learned. That is why, obviously, we accepted the resignation of the Commissioner of the RCMP. It was his decision, not our decision.

Officials are not in any way restricted or forbidden from appearing before a parliamentary committee.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, "at the same time as everybody" means last week and that the Prime Minister did not know before last week. We need to know, because more and more he is trying to not answer the questions, and it looks more and more like a cover-up. The Prime Minister must tell the truth about when he learned. Was it last week or before?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition will have to learn that once we get our questions answered, we have to come here the next week with some new questions, not with the same questions as before.

Oral Questions

In terms of any allegation of a cover-up, I would once again note that the events in question occurred under the stewardship of the government of which the Leader of the Opposition was a member. I would encourage the members of that government to come forward with all the information they know about the Arar affair.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will keep asking questions until we get answers.

We now know that the Minister of Public Safety, the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Foreign Affairs urged the Prime Minister to remove the RCMP commissioner in the fall, this long before the matter became a crisis. The Prime Minister ignored their advice, ignored all evidence and protected the commissioner.

Since the public safety minister has refused to answer this question seven times and since the Minister of Foreign Affairs will only admit to statements caught by *Hansard*, will the justice minister answer? Will the Minister of Justice now admit that he pushed for the removal of the RCMP commissioner prior to last Monday, yes or no?

• (1420)

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the issue here is not questions not being answered. As a matter of fact, we have answered those questions. I have answered that question that he has put to me a number of times, saying that it was utterly lacking in any kind of fact whatsoever.

The issue here is not that we do not answer the question. The issue here is that when those members hear the truth, they do not like to accept it. When the member opposite asks a question and gets a response he does not like, he lights his hair on fire and says that nobody will answer his question.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the question was clear and it was direct and we have no answer. The only answer we have is from the Prime Minister's spin machine.

Why did the Prime Minister's go to such lengths to protect the commissioner? Why did he do nothing when he knew everything in early November? Why did he wait until there was massive public outrage to demand action? The committee and Canadians deserve answers.

Will the Prime Minister confirm that his national security adviser and Mr. Elliott will be available for the committee to question before we break for Christmas, or will they continue to be too busy?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have already answered that question a couple of times today, but let me once again recount the facts for the hon. member. I think the important thing to remember is that Commissioner Zaccardelli himself tendered his resignation in what he believed to be the best interests of the RCMP. That is why the government accepted his resignation.

I would point out to all hon. members who give this any more than 30 seconds' thought that only as a last resort, only under the most extreme circumstances, would the Prime Minister ever intervene in the national police force to start hiring and firing people at will. Commissioner Zaccardelli took the decision. We supported that decision.

[*Translation*]

MAHER ARAR INQUIRY

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Maher Arar feels that the RCMP commissioner's resignation is not enough and that certain pieces of information must now be made public.

Will the Prime Minister, in the name of fairness to Mr. Arar, promise to make public the names of the people responsible for the media leaks concerning Mr. Arar, particularly the people who continued to allow the leaks, which discredited Mr. Arar, even while Justice O'Connor was conducting the inquiry?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is finally a good question. We are very concerned about the question of who may have given information to the media and we want to know who those people are. Indeed, giving information to the media was a very bad thing to do.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to give the minister an opportunity, since he likes my questions. I have a question for which he has the answer and I would like him to give us the answer here today.

Maher Arar and every member of this House all want to know who in the RCMP gave the Americans the information that led to Maher Arar's deportation to Syria? The minister knows the answer to this question, and I would like him to tell us here today.

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to Justice O'Connor's report, people from the RCMP gave the information to the Americans. I will try to obtain names. Once I obtain them, if possible, I will give those names to my hon. colleague.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in order to fully clear his reputation and recover all his rights, Maher Arar wants assurance that his name will be removed from the U.S. suspected terrorist watch list.

What is the government waiting for to act with determination and demand that the Americans remove Maher Arar's name from this list?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have indicated to the Americans that we have removed Mr. Arar's name and the names of his family members from our lists. And we have asked the Americans to do the same. The United States is a sovereign nation. I do not know whether they will comply, but we have asked them to do so.

• (1425)

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we think that the Canadian government owes more than that to Maher Arar and that it has to demand that the Americans remove his name from the list.

Why does the government refuse to make public the entire O'Connor report, something Mr. Arar has been asking for and regarding which Justice O'Connor has no objection and sees no threat to Canada's safety?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all it is important to note that Justice O'Connor has said that all the information that he ever wanted to look at, he was allowed to look at.

In certain cases, in certain very narrow pieces of legislation, it is deemed to be, if they are made public, that they could have a detrimental effect on national security. In those narrow cases alone, a decision was made to withhold the information, but it had nothing to do with any names in terms of individuals who could have been at fault and who could have done anything inappropriate in any way on the Canadian side. Any of the information that was withheld was strictly from the point of view of national security.

* * *

*[Translation]***STATUS OF WOMEN**

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday marked the 25th anniversary of Canada's ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Yet after years of Conservative and Liberal government, women in Canada make only 71¢ for every dollar a man makes.

Will the Prime Minister put women on a equal footing with men by introducing pay equity and a federal minimum wage and creating real day care spaces to help women finally participate fully in the labour force here in Canada?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have decided to act immediately on pay equity instead of waiting for new legislation that would take months and months and months.

We have asked our inspectors to go out into the field and visit businesses to make sure they have a pay equity program for women.

We feel that by being proactive, we will truly help the cause of women, and that is the approach we will take.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is going to be whispering in the ears of the various companies, I assume, to suggest that they finally get on board with women's equality.

The Prime Minister said in the last election that he was committed to "ensure that Canada fully upholds its commitments to women in Canada". He certainly has not done that. He has rejected pay equity. He has removed the goal of equality from the Status of Women organization. He has done nothing to create child care, and surely he would at least admit that, despite the fact that there are thousands of working families waiting for spaces.

How much longer do women have to wait for fairness? When will we stop getting proclamations and start getting action on women's equality?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Labour just said, the government is

pursuing aggressively obligations with the private sector under existing pay equity legislation.

This government has done a number of other things for women, of course, and obviously there is the universal child benefit that goes to all Canadian families. We have increased funding to on reserve family violence shelters by \$6 million. The Minister of Indian Affairs has begun action on matrimonial property rights.

While those members over there want to protect lawyers, we have proceeded with stronger legislation on criminal violence against women. We hope the House will pass that.

Hon. Belinda Stronach (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the recent cuts to the Status of Women and the removal of the goal of equality from the mandate of the women's program speak volumes about the Conservatives' regressive approach to women's concerns.

Canada has made great strides toward greater equality, but the current government has put that success at risk. Women still earn only 71 cents on the dollar of what a man earns. That is not equality.

If the minister has indeed changed her mind on that cut, will she also change her mind and reinstate the goal of equality into the mandate of the women's program?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government does stand up for the equality of all Canadians.

It is only members opposite who would fight for more offices and more bureaucracy and who would fight to use 31 cents to deliver one dollar. Only members opposite would not remember that they cut the women's program budget by five times. What did they do with that money when they cut that program?

We believe in equality and we are doing something about it. We are making sure that aboriginal women have matrimonial property rights. We are making sure they have a right to a decent job. We are making sure they have financial security in their senior years.

● (1430)

Hon. Belinda Stronach (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Finance Canada's website clearly shows a \$5 million cut to the Status of Women as part of the government's elimination of so-called wasteful and ineffective programs. On September 26 and 28, the Minister responsible for the Status of Women confirmed to this House in her own words that she had cut that \$5 million.

Now the minister and other Conservative ministers have said that the money that was not actually cut will be redirected. Can the Minister responsible for the Status of Women tell us on what page and on what line of the estimates we will find this explicit reinvestment?

Oral Questions

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the \$5 million is available right now. We are telling them that. At the end of this fiscal year, as of April 1, that \$5 million will be allocated to directly assist women in their communities. We are not talking about cutting. We are talking about making sure that we find savings in streamlining in operations and that in the next fiscal year that money will be made available directly to women in their communities.

[Translation]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to know where that \$5 million is because we have learned that the Conservative government is closing the Status of Women Canada offices in Sainte-Foy in the Quebec City region.

This closure is part of the several million dollars in cuts that the government has made to the Status of Women Canada.

I have a question for the Minister of International Cooperation because this issue affects her region, unless the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister wants to answer. How could these two hon. members, who are women, ever have agreed to give the Status of Women Canada such a slap in the face?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, on this side of the House every member of government is committed to Canadian women. As we know, we have a responsibility and accountability. The party on the opposite side should recognize the fact that in due process there are notifications that have to be given to employees. We also know that we have obligations and that is why we are saying the changes will come into effect at the beginning of the 2007 fiscal year.

[Translation]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is unbelievable. This morning we met with groups of women from coalitions all across Canada and they told us exactly the opposite. They know how much damage these Conservative minority government cuts will do, not just to the Status of Women Canada but more importantly to the groups that depend on it.

Can the minister tell the House whether these two hon. colleagues, who are women elected in the Quebec City region, objected to the decision to cut the Status of Women Canada office in Sainte-Foy? Did they object in caucus, at the cabinet table or in private?

Did these women say something to help other women in Canada?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me assure the House that not only do all caucus members in the government ensure that they meet their responsibilities to every woman in Canada but they also bring to the attention of their fellow caucus members the interests of their own constituents. We recognize our responsibilities to our constituents and all of Canada. This is a good decision for all Canadian women in every constituency across Canada.

[Translation]

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, women's organizations, unions, and spokespeople for all the opposition parties came and demonstrated in front of Parliament last week to denounce the cuts that this government made to programs that help women.

Will the Minister of Canadian Heritage and the Status of Women give up her ideological approach, which sees grants for women's programs as just more waste? Will she restore the funding of Status of Women Canada and the court challenges program, as a broad coalition of women asked her to do last weekend?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to be very clear and accurate. There has been no cut to the budget of the women's program. The women's program had \$10.8 million last year, has \$10.8 million this year, and will have \$10.8 million next year. What we are talking about is \$5 million more in the next fiscal year for more work, more benefits, and more direct health for women.

• (1435)

[Translation]

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister's answers clearly show that she is totally out of touch with reality. If she thought that she could divide women's groups with this attempt, she was sadly mistaken because the Canada-wide coalition of women anticipated it and demolished it.

Are we to understand the minister's answer to mean that she has decided, under the pretext of good management, to cut all support to women's groups that are working so hard on the political advancement of women?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, let me very clear. Only the members on the other side of the House believe it is important to fund women's organizations and groups. We are saying that we will fund groups and organizations that want to directly help women in their neighbourhoods and communities to address the challenges that women are facing today and have been facing for a number of years.

* * *

[Translation]

SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the SCPI program ends on March 31. Thousands of people who work with the homeless are wondering what will become of the only program that is able to help them and able to fight youth homelessness.

In light of the insensitive attitude of the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, can the Prime Minister show a little more sensitivity to the poor people in Quebec and Canada and announce right now that the SCPI program will be extended?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we care about the homeless. That is why we extended the national homelessness initiative last spring, complete with full funding right through to the end of March 2007. We have been processing the applications in the manner they have always gone through. In addition, we made \$37 million more available, money that was not spent by the previous government and money that we have made available to help the homeless situation across Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister has been boasting for almost a year now about reviewing the SCPI program, but she is not answering the question.

Is the minister waiting for the current services to run out or is she simply getting ready to abolish or cut back this program? People who work with the homeless want an answer.

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are very aware of the timelines that are inherent in this. As I said, we extended the program through to March 31 to give us a chance to evaluate the existing program and to see, if possible, whether there are programs that might be even better. We will be dealing with those in due course.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government's underwhelming announcement on toxic chemicals is yet another clean air flaw and it is inexcusable because the government had all the information it needed in a comprehensive Liberal government report on toxic substances. We studied 23,000 substances and called for urgent action on 4,000.

Why is the government taking three years to act on only 200 substances when action is needed on 4,000?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after 13 years and no action on toxins that are cancer causing chemicals in our own households and our environment, this government announced on Friday a groundbreaking world leading toxin management plan. Let me tell members what the Canadian Cancer Society said. It said that Friday was a good day for public health. It also said:

No Canadian should be exposed to cancer-causing substances. It's a comprehensive plan, more money is being put into it, and the chemicals will be evaluated a lot quicker.

It was a good day on Friday and she should be celebrating on behalf of all Canadians.

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that when the government has a good news announcement, it waits until Friday afternoon to make it. Bisphenol A is a chemical that just last week was again linked to breast cancer. It is often used in a variety of plastic consumer products including: some plastic water bottles, dental sealants for children's teeth, resins that line tin cans and children's toys.

Can the minister explain why it is not one of the 200 priority substances she plans to list over the next three years?

• (1440)

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the toxic management plan that this government announced on Friday goes beyond what the United States and the European Union have in place. It is the most aggressive plan in the world. The health of Canadians and the health of our children are at the forefront of what the government is doing.

Let me tell members what Dr. Rick Smith from Environmental Defence said. He said that the government deserved credit for taking decisive action. I know that is something new to that party, decisive action to protect the health of Canadians.

[Translation]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, maybe the Minister of the Environment will listen to this. In an open letter, 700 Canadian scientists urged the government to include mandatory targets in the Canadian Environmental Protection Act.

Since neither the government nor the minister wants to do anything, will they at least let the committee rewrite the act to include what the 700 Canadian scientists are asking for?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, the measures that we took on Friday addressed some of the concerns of the scientific community. We welcome their efforts.

It was the Prime Minister who made sure in our Speech from the Throne that we asked for a CEPA review process because it is the most important piece of environmental legislation. Who is holding up that process so that we can make important amendments to this legislation? The opposition, not the government.

[Translation]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government ordered the evaluation of 23,000 toxic substances and created a legislative framework to eliminate toxic substances once the report was completed. We did all the work. All that remained was to act, but once again, this Conservative minority government found a way to put it all off till kingdom come.

The Conservatives prefer to preach at everyone rather than do what the scientists have asked them to do. Why?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is embarrassing that the Liberal Party, after 13 years, did nothing to ban toxic chemicals that cause cancer in our children. Let me read what Aaron Freeman from Environmental Defence said, "By announcing a plan to deal with many of the most harmful toxic chemicals, the Conservatives have ventured where the Liberals refused to tread".

Oral Questions

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, contrary to what the members opposite would say, last Friday the Prime Minister made a historic announcement regarding the protection of the health of Canadians and the environment. Could the Minister of the Environment inform the House if Canada's new government is moving forward to protect Canadians from toxic chemicals?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as members know, on Friday Canada's new government committed \$300 million over four years to implement the chemical management plan. This action makes Canada a global leader in protecting Canadians from exposure to harmful and cancer-causing toxins.

Ken Kyle of the Canadian Cancer Society called it a good day for public health. He went on to say, "No Canadian should be exposed to cancer-causing substances".

It is a comprehensive plan, more money is being put into it, and the chemicals will be evaluated a lot quicker. After 13 long years of Liberal inaction on air pollution, this government is a breath of fresh air.

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FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at this time of year, Canadians are fuelling our economy with billions in purchases. This adds to our prosperity and is good for small business. However, every cent counts, especially at this time of year, and that is why Canadians want fairness from their banks.

Canadians using a competitor's bank machine to withdraw \$20 get less money and more fees: a fee from the competitor and, sometimes, from their own bank. Yet, in other parts of the world, like the U.K., there are no fees for using a competitor's bank machine.

Will the government bring in bank fee fairness and legislate the end of competitor ATM fees?

• (1445)

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we count on our banking system to be competitive. I encourage consumers to shop and to have a look around at banks, credit unions and every option they have for banking machines in this country. They should shop competitively and make the right choice for themselves. We believe in competition in financial institutions in Canada.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, then perhaps the minister should consider the fact that the big banks just announced a record combined profit of \$19 billion. All service fees combined accounted for less than 5% of their revenues. Bank fee fairness is not going to break the banks, but it will mean more money in the pockets of ordinary Canadians this holiday season.

When will the government start siding with today's families and bring in a package of fee reforms that would end competitor ATM fees and control credit card interest rates?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I say, we believe in competition. There are differences between

banks, certain trust companies and certain credit unions on fees. However, in the spirit of Christmas, I say to the member that I will bring this up with the banks and hope that the Christmas spirit prevails.

* * *

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday farmers in western Canada sent the Conservative government a clear message: the government does not speak for the majority of western grain farmers when it comes to the Wheat Board, and it never did. Over 60% of the ballots cast in the director elections were for pro-board candidates and 80% of those elected support the Wheat Board.

Will the minister, instead of being directed by the PMO, finally listen to farmers? Will he cease and desist in firing the CEO, withdraw his gag orders, and allow the farmer controlled board to do its work without interference from him?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can tell members who does not speak for the Canadian Wheat Board, and that is the hon. member for Malpeque. That is why we are going to hold a plebiscite among the farmers this January and February. We are going to ask them a clear question about barley: do they want more marketing choice for barley or not? That is who should speak. The farmers are going to speak and certainly, we will be listening.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the farmers spoke yesterday and the minister knows it. The results of the Canadian Wheat Board director elections are particularly telling in the riding of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Pro single desk selling achieved two-thirds of the votes cast. Clearly, the parliamentary secretary is completely out of touch with farmers. Now 80% of board directors are pro single desk selling.

If the minister really is of sound mind, will he limit the advice from his parliamentary secretary and turn to the elected board of directors of the Wheat Board?

Oral Questions

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course I continue to consult with the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands who has his pulse on the community. That is why he continues to be re-elected with increasing majorities every single election. Of course, I will also be listening to farmers.

I do not know what it is about that side of the House. Those members want to listen to Prince Edward Island. They want to listen to Quebec. They want to talk to Ontario. But they do not want to give the same freedom to western Canadian farmers that the rest of the country has. Why will they not listen to the farmers when the plebiscite comes up this January?

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, maybe he will listen to Manitoba.

The Conservatives continue to attack the Canadian Wheat board despite the damage they are doing to western producers and to Canada's international relationships. We understand that some third parties are now refusing to sign agreements with the Canadian Wheat Board because of the minority government's undermining actions. The Minister of Agriculture said that the plebiscite on barley is non-binding and he will not commit to respecting the results.

When will the government start acting democratically, ask farmers a straight question and then respect the outcome?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely clear what we are going to do with the Wheat Board. The Wheat Board will be there. It is going to continue to be there. The plebiscite we are having is on barley and on barley only, for the coming year. The wheat will continue to be handled by the Canadian Wheat Board. Our buyers should know that and our sellers should know that. We have been perfectly clear.

The fearmongering over there is what is disturbing. Those members continue to tell our international buyers, "Do not come to Canada. Something is wrong". We have the best wheat, the best products, the best farmers. International buyers should buy it up.

* * *

• (1450)

[Translation]

SUPPLY MANAGEMENT

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it appears that the minister will impose his ideology regardless of what western producers think. However, this threat extends beyond western Canada. This government's arrogant actions also worry producers in the supply management system. They have good cause to be wary of this Conservative government, which has always opposed this system.

Will the government ignore producers as it is ignoring the Canadian Wheat Board, and will it dismantle supply management in Canada?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we supported the supply management system during the last federal

election campaign. We have continued to support the supply management system.

[English]

Every time they try to link freedom of choice for western Canadian farmers to supply management just shows how desperate they are.

We support supply management. We supported it in Geneva. We supported it during the campaign. We continue to support it. And we support freedom of choice for western Canadian farmers, something they simply do not understand.

* * *

[Translation]

TEXTILE AND APPAREL INDUSTRIES

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last week, the federal government finally eliminated certain import tariffs on textile products. This measure is disappointing because it is deficient. What the textile and apparel industries need is a comprehensive support plan, as the Bloc Québécois has been proposing since February 2005.

What is the government waiting for to implement a buy local policy, to impose quotas on Chinese imports and to insist that other countries raise their minimum labour standards and environmental standards?

[English]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the recent announcement by the Minister of Finance of a further \$4.5 million in duty relief on imported textiles will help apparel firms across Canada maintain jobs by becoming more productive and more competitive.

The government is aware of the challenges facing the textile and apparel industries and is committed to the long term viability of these industries in Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government claims that it is not abandoning the textile and apparel industries. Yet, it refuses to take any significant action.

What is the government waiting for to create an assistance program to modernize the apparel and textile sectors, a program that would encourage the development of high value added products?

[English]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are not abandoning the industry. We are taking action. We are also taking the textile production efficiency component, known as CANTex, part of the Canadian apparel and textile industry programs. It is available to help Canadian textile industry improve its productivity and refocus production on higher value added products.

We are going to continue to work with all governments and industry stakeholders to address the challenges that promote these new opportunities.

*Oral Questions***INCOME TRUSTS**

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives provided Canadians with a nasty little Halloween surprise that cost them \$25 billion on income trusts.

Having destroyed the savings of hard-working Canadians, Conservatives are now proposing to give them a nastier Christmas gift. Investors who converted on the strength of the Conservative promise will get a love note from the tax man. For many, the value of their investment on December 31 will be less than the deemed conversion value and tax will be payable.

Will the Minister of Finance give relief to these betrayed investors, or is that just his way of saying merry Christmas and happy new year?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike the previous government, we dealt with this issue in the interest of tax fairness for Canadians, yes, and that corporations in Canada would pay their fair share of taxes. I know members opposite do not think that is the right thing to do, but we as Conservatives think that all Canadians, whether they are corporations or individuals, should pay their fair share of taxes.

The implementation rules with respect to the income trusts should be available before Christmas.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General issued a scathing criticism of the Liberal performance on first nations land claims settlements. Today Canada's new Conservative government takes this issue seriously. Premier Campbell of B.C. said last Friday that the Minister of Indian Affairs has been relentless in his pursuit of finding conclusions for treaties. He said that he appreciated the tireless efforts of the minister in that regard which helped bring them to that day.

Can the minister tell the House about the initialling of two settlement agreements in B.C. this past weekend?

• (1455)

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was in late October that Canada's new government initialled the first modern B.C. treaty process with the Lheidli T'enneh First Nation in British Columbia. It was with great pride that this past weekend Premier Campbell and I signed not one but two agreements with the Tsawwassen First Nation and the Maa-nulth First Nations.

There is a fair bit of noise on the other side of the House and I think hon. members want me to remind Canadians one more time that in 13 years the Liberals spent close to a billion dollars and did not sign a single treaty, not one, zero, nothing.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the holidays are upon us and Canadians are hanging their stockings hoping for a gift from Santa, maybe even something for

the environment. Unfortunately they fear the grinch, in this case played by the Minister of the Environment who is offering them no more than a lump of coal perhaps to burn in a coal fired plant somewhere in the country.

Today we offer her a chance at redemption. Will the minister change her ways and let her heart grow two sizes today? Will she commit to work with New Democrats to rewrite the government's deeply flawed bill for scientifically based targets that will change the ending of this global warming story?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my heart is so big I am willing to work with all of the parties in the House, including the New Democrats. I am even looking forward to working with all the opposition parties on the legislative committee. I believe that those members should be named shortly and in the new year we can finally get down to cutting greenhouse gases and air pollution together in this chamber.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I fear the road to redemption might be just a little too long for that particular grinch. In the few short months she has been the Minister of the Environment, she has slashed funding for climate change. She has cut and run on Kyoto without putting another plan in place. She has continually embarrassed Canada on the international stage.

Will the minister finally see the light, restore the funding, set serious pollution targets, take her job seriously and finally get her party of dinosaurs to do something serious about the environment?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after that question I do not know if I am as excited to work with the member, but as I have said continuously and the environment commissioner has said, the plan by the former Liberal government was a failure. We know after all of the billions of dollars committed that we are only 1% closer to even reaching our Kyoto target or the reductions we needed.

We have said repeatedly, and we have been honest with our international partners and honest with Canadians, that the Kyoto target is unachievable. There is wide recognition of that. It is time to get down to business and to set new targets together.

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PUBLICATIONS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government's ideological driven cuts continue to puzzle Canadians. In a year in which we saw a surplus of over \$13 billion left by the previous Liberal government, the Conservatives are abandoning the publications assistance program.

Oral Questions

Small-town newspapers across the country depend on this program. Small businesses will lose advertising space and an important part of the fabric of hundreds of Canadian communities will be lost.

Will the Minister of Canadian Heritage admit that she has made yet another mistake and stop this disaster for small-town newspapers?

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the House and all Canadians that the Prime Minister and the minister will take steps that will solve this problem. If anybody is standing up for rural Canadians, it this party.

After 13 years of dithering and nothing being done, this party is going to do it. This government is a government of action.

* * *

FEDERAL ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is worth noting that during the recent Liberal leadership campaign, not a single candidate bothered to mention that accountability was a serious issue for the Liberal Party to address. That is unfortunate, since a recent poll found that the number one complaint by Canadians about the Liberals was that they were corrupt. The number two complaint was that the Liberal Party was arrogant and has not changed.

Can the President of the Treasury Board today tell the House how passage of the federal accountability act into law would change forever the leftover Liberal legacy of corruption into a culture of accountability?

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on January 1 Canadians from coast to coast are going to wake up to a new accountability regime in this country, but when they wake up, they are going to have a hangover, the ethical hangover of the Liberal Party.

Let me tell the House about Gerard Kennedy. He owes \$200,000. Let us talk about Bob Rae. He owes \$845,000. Maybe the Leader of the Opposition will use today to tell us how he is going to pay back the nearly half a million dollars his own campaign ended up in hock.

* * *

● (1500)

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government has lost all touch with reality. We have seen the Canadian Wheat Board director election results. Eight out of 10 elected directors now represent farmers who support single desk.

At the same time, we have two new directors, one who was fired by the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and the other one who is openly hostile to the very idea of a Wheat Board. In fact, he stated last week that no one should be fighting on behalf of farmers, including the government.

Is it the intention of the minister to destroy the Wheat Board from within, or will he begin an open face to face dialogue with the newly elected directors about which system best suits farmers?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course I will be working with the new board of directors. We continue also to urge the Wheat Board to fulfill its mandate, which is to market grain for western Canadian farmers and do that in an orderly way. I would continue to urge the board of directors and the management team at the Canadian Wheat Board to work hard to fulfill that mandate.

The prices are good. The crop is in. The quality is high. The board should get at the job of marketing that grain as quickly as possible, at the best price possible for western Canadian farmers.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, apropos the answer that was just given by the Minister of Agriculture, the president and chief executive officer of the Canadian Wheat Board is the chief salesman for the Wheat Board. He is the one who sits down with buyers around the world to do the transactions.

He is under dire personal threat by the government and the minister. If the minister wants the Wheat Board to do its job, will he now, in light of the elections on the weekend, ensure that the CEO remains in place and not under threat by the minister?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course we continue to urge the management team and the board of directors to do what they should be doing, which is to market grain as aggressively as possible on behalf of western Canadian farmers.

What we are not interested in doing is what the previous government did. Remember Reg Alcock? Remember his campaign manager? Remember right after the election how that person became government director at the Wheat Board? We are not going to do that kind of thing.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Kim Howells, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: I would also like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Kevin Menicoche, Minister of Transportation and Minister Responsible for the Public Utilities Board of the Northwest Territories.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

●(1505)

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to five petitions.

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Hon. Charles Hubbard (Miramichi, Lib.) moved that Bill S-213, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (cruelty to animals), be read the first time.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to present to the House a bill that was recently approved by the Senate. It has been an ongoing issue in terms of Parliament and I am sure the members will want to deal with it as soon as possible.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I move that sixth report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, presented on Monday, October 2, 2006, be concurred in.

I want to read the report, which consists of a motion passed at the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. On Thursday, September 28, and pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee adopted the following motion regarding the remaining 140 stateless Vietnamese refugees in the Philippines. The motion reads:

WHEREAS, until recently, 2,000 forgotten Vietnamese refugees remained stateless in the Philippines for over a decade and half without being given any status;

WHEREAS, this group of Vietnamese refugees represents the last group of "boat people" from Vietnam, stranded in limbo since 1989;

WHEREAS, Australia, the United Kingdom, Norway and the United States have recognized these people as refugees and resettled the majority of them;

WHEREAS, Canada agreed to take up to 200 of these Vietnamese refugees;

WHEREAS, only 23 individuals from eight families qualified to come to Canada under the programme announced by the previous government;

WHEREAS, 140 individuals are left behind without a durable solution after 17 years of displacement and statelessness;

WHEREAS, Canada had a remarkable record for the resettlement of Vietnamese "boat people";

WHEREAS, Vietnamese refugees who came to Canada as part of that important refugee movement have integrated well into Canada society and, as Canadian citizens, make important contributions to our communities;

WHEREAS, many Canadians including members of the Vietnamese Community in Canada are willing and able to be private sponsors for these 140 individuals;

WHEREAS, Canada accepts some 30,000 refugees annually and already has in place humanitarian and compassionate programs that would allow the resettlement of these individuals;

WHEREAS, the Vietnamese refugees remaining in the Philippines meet the criteria set under the 'Country of Asylum' class of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act which requires that the applicant:

- Be outside his/her country of citizenship;
- Has been affected by civil war or armed conflict;
- or Has suffered violations of human rights;
- Has no possibility, within a reasonable period of time, of having a durable solution; and
- Be privately sponsored.

WHEREAS, under Section 25(1) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration also has the power to grant permanent residence in Canada on humanitarian and compassionate grounds;

THEREFORE, The Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration requests the following:

1. The Honourable Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to allow the urgent resettlement in Canada of the remaining 140 Vietnamese refugees stranded in the Philippines on humanitarian and compassionate grounds under the 'Country of Asylum' class or using Section 25(1) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act or via some other mechanism;
2. During this process, these individuals be required to undergo normal procedures like all other refugees admitted into Canada;
3. The Honourable Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to respond, in writing, to members of this Committee, within a reasonable period of time, the overall result of Canada's efforts in providing a durable solution to this last group of "boat people" from Vietnam

That is the full text of the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration regarding the situation of stateless Vietnamese refugees in the Philippines.

The committee looked into this very carefully over the course of two parliaments, both in the previous 38th Parliament and in this the 39th Parliament.

The situation of Vietnamese refugees stranded in the Philippines was first brought to the attention of the standing committee during the 38th Parliament. At that time, representatives of the Vietnamese Canadian community and Vietnamese communities in other countries, appeared before the committee to ask us to advocate for Canada's assistance to these people.

Representatives of these committees appeared before the standing committee again in this Parliament on May 31, 2006. When they first appeared, approximately 2,000 Vietnamese refugees were in the Philippines, people who had fled Vietnam at the end of the war. Many of these people had left Vietnam in exactly the same circumstances as Vietnamese boat people refugees, many of whom are resettled in Canada.

●(1510)

Unfortunately for these 2,000 people, they missed the provisions of the United Nations comprehensive plan of action, the United Nations sponsored resettlement program that saw over 500,000 Vietnamese refugees settled in 74 countries around the world. It was under the auspices of this program that Canada resettled 145,000 Vietnamese boat people refugees in this country, almost 25% of the total. These 2,000 people missed that opportunity. They remained in the Philippines without hope of returning to Vietnam and with no hope of gaining status in the Philippines.

The standing committee heard details of their situation. They had and have no legal status in the Philippines. They could not work legally in the Philippines. They had no rights to education. Even if they married a Filipino citizen, their situation did not change, and their children, even if one of the parents were Filipino, also remained stateless.

Routine Proceedings

Thanks to the efforts of the Vietnamese communities in Australia, the United States, Norway and Canada, and the actions of those governments, most of the 2,000 people have now been resettled. However, in May the standing committee heard that approximately 140 stateless Vietnamese remained in the Philippines with no hope of a durable solution to their situation.

It should be noted that the previous Liberal government instituted a program to allow some of these people to come to Canada. It was a limited program. To be eligible, one had to have a close relative in Canada who was willing and financially able to sponsor the individual. At first it was hoped that upward of 500 people might be able to take advantage of this program. Sadly, only 23 people from eight families ultimately arrived here. This proved to be a completely inadequate response to the situation.

There had been some concern among Filipino lawmakers to address this situation of the stateless Vietnamese in the Philippines. A change in Filipino law is required to address their situation. However, in the 17 years that they have been in the Philippines, no legal measure has had a full hearing, and none is likely in the near future. In fact, the Philippines Bureau of Immigration has made a very clear statement on the situation of the stateless Vietnamese. It states:

The consistent policy of the Philippine Government is to repatriate said RVNs (the returning Vietnamese) to Vietnam, or resettle them to a third country willing to accept them. The Philippines has never been, and is not, a resettlement country. It also has no intention of socially integrating persons whose applications for asylum/refugee status it denied in the first place.

The fact that a legal solution is unlikely to be found in the Philippines has been confirmed by a member of the House of Representatives of the Republic of the Philippines, Ms. Loretta Ann Rosales, who wrote to the parliamentary secretary to the minister of immigration and multicultural affairs of Australia, Mr. Andrew Robb, on September 10, 2006. I would like to read from that letter:

Dear Hon. Robb,

May I respectfully endorse the submission of the Vietnamese Community in Australia dated March 2006 concerning the remaining stateless Vietnamese in the Philippines that I understand has been transmitted to your office. I consider resettlement to a third country, as proposed by the submission, to be a vital element of a humane and durable solution for approximately 145 stateless Vietnamese in the Philippines.

You may be aware that two proposed measures were filed before the Justice Committee of the Philippines House of Representatives during the 12th Congress, House Bills Nos. 1272 and 5371.

Both bills sought the granting of permanent residency to the remaining stateless Vietnamese in the Philippines. Similarly, a bill was introduced by Congressman Roilo Golez in 1998 concerning permanent residency for the stateless Vietnamese.

As you would no doubt appreciate, enactment of a law is not a simple process. Bills, such as the permanent residency bills, take on an average of nine years to pass through the various readings and procedures and then finally take effect as law in the Philippines. The bills granting permanent residency for the stateless Vietnamese in the Philippines were, sad to say, not passed into law.

For those Vietnamese who have been stateless for 17 years, this is a significant period of time to wait for a solution to their problem—a solution which may not be realized in the soonest possible time.

Therefore, Australia and other resettlement countries have a continuing role to play in contributing to a durable solution and a future for these people. I understand that Australia was the first to recognize the humanitarian needs of this stateless group by resettling 256 people under the Special Humanitarian Program. I also understand that other resettlement countries such as the UK, America, Norway and Canada have since followed suit and resettled almost all the remaining Vietnamese.

●(1515)

May I therefore respectfully recommend that you, as we urge all other resettlement countries, to give sympathetic consideration to the plight of the 145 remaining stateless Vietnamese in the Philippines.

Let us work together to finalize this 17 year old predicament.

That is the end of the quote from the letter of Representative Rosales of the Philippine Congress.

There is clearly no durable solution to the situation of these stateless Vietnamese available in the Philippines.

Sadly, Canada, through the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, has taken the position that these stateless Vietnamese are not refugees. Canadian officials believe they have “integrated” into Filipino society.

I dispute this analysis. These are clearly people who have fled Vietnam because of their very real fear of persecution at the conclusion of the war. They remain in the Philippines without status. They have no legal rights, even to earning a living or education. I will maintain that statelessness and integration are exclusive of each other. A stateless person can never be fully integrated into a community or a society.

Canada has also maintained that other countries, which have resettled some of the stateless Vietnamese, have done so without recognizing them as refugees. This position is also disputed by those who have worked on the resettlement campaign. Testimony was presented to the standing committee by Mr. Hoi Trinh, an Australian lawyer who has spearheaded this resettlement campaign, that Norway passed a special law to recognize these people as refugees: Australia used its “Special Humanitarian Programme” and issued visas which recognized them as refugees within the visas.

On May 31, when the Vietnamese community again appeared before the standing committee, I asked Hoi Trinh if there was anything that characterized the remaining stateless Vietnamese. Did they present particular problems? Was there reason to be concerned about them, given that they had not been selected for resettlement by other countries?

Mr. Trinh replied:

No, and that's the most unfortunate thing. They have never been considered, so they have never been denied. It's not as if they were interviewed by the U.S. or Australia or Norway and then rejected because of their medical condition or a criminal background. They've never been considered. They've never even been interviewed.

I had an email update from Hoi Trinh yesterday. He reported that the United States returned to Manila last month to interview some cases for which specific appeals had been made and accepted a few more. This means that there are now 125 stateless Vietnamese remaining and these folks have 27 half-Filipino dependants; 125 people remain from the 500,000 who fled the war in Vietnam and its aftermath. Surely after all these years living in limbo they deserve a chance to make a new life with security and a future for themselves and their families.

Routine Proceedings

I want to address what I think is the most important feature of this situation. Here in Canada those organizing to press this issue are members of the Vietnamese Canadian community. Most are people who also fled Vietnam after the war, most as boat people refugees. Most were among the 145,000 people resettled in Canada as the result of that huge refugee movement. These are people who received Canada's welcome. They know the support of our communities.

Now they have adapted to life in Canada. They have integrated into our communities. They have made a significant contribution to the Canadian cultural mosaic. They now know themselves to be Canadians and they want to extend the welcome they received in a time of trouble and difficulty to others who continue to face the same situation they knew.

This is an amazing success story. It demonstrates the way newcomers to Canada become part of our society and share in our values. Members of the Vietnamese Canadian community want to extend the same welcome they received to these stateless Vietnamese. They want to act on the Canadian values they benefited from themselves. They want to act on Canadian values they have come to share.

The Vietnamese Canadian community has rallied around this issue and this cause. Canadians, who were involved in the resettlement of boat people, are ready to be involved. Others who know the importance of refugee resettlement, where repatriation and other durable solutions are not available, are ready to be involved. All these Canadians are prepared to organize the support necessary to ensure these remaining stateless Vietnamese get a chance for a new life, a chance for a future that is secure, but they need our government to make such an important project possible. Canadians are ready to help.

• (1520)

Back on November 7 of this year, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration appeared before the standing committee. At that time I asked him about his response to the situation of Vietnamese boat people refugees who remained stranded in the Philippines. I would like to quote that exchange. I put the following to the minister:

I want to change topics, Minister, and ask about the stateless Vietnamese in the Philippines. You know the committee has taken a strong position on that. It has called on you to institute measures, either under the country of asylum class or under special humanitarian and compassionate grounds, to deal with the 140 people who are still in the Philippines without a durable solution to their circumstances.

I'm wondering if you have been able to take any action on that situation.

The minister replied:

I know you have an interest in this. Canada has already weighed in to try to provide some help for people in this situation. We feel we have done our share. We'd like to see the rest of the world jump in and pull their weight on this as well. I know it's a troubling situation.

We feel we're doing our job in terms of accepting refugees. In fact, we're going above and beyond, which is why we've been singled out by the UNHCR time and again for showing leadership on refugee issues. We would always like to be more generous, but we can't do everything.

That's the entire exchange, word for word.

I do not share the minister's opinion. I do not believe, as he put it, that "we have done our share". Canadians are ready to do their part to assist this group of refugees. They are organized and they are

standing by. Canada has made a huge and outstanding commitment in the past on which to draw in this regard. The resettlement of 145,000 Vietnamese refugees in Canada offers us a blueprint and incredible experience to get this job done and accomplished.

I urge all members of the House to support concurrence in the standing committee report and call upon the government to act urgently to find a mechanism to resettle these remaining stateless Vietnamese here in Canada.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 2,000 Vietnamese refugees in the Philippines are unable to buy homes. They cannot own businesses, travel freely or work legally. They have to subsist through sales in the black market and other creative means to make their living.

I was also told that if children go to school, even if they graduate with whatever certificate, degree or diploma, they would not be accepted anywhere. For 16 years, they have drifted in uncertainty, not having a place to call home. Yet they have not given up hope.

What action can be taken to assist the refugees who are stuck in the Philippines if the House of Commons accepts the motion for concurrence by the immigration committee.

• (1525)

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Trinity—Spadina for highlighting the circumstances of the 125 stateless Vietnamese people who remain in the Philippines.

Luckily, governments around the world stepped in to do a major resettlement effort on the 2,000 people who were there two years ago. The United States, Australia, Norway and the United Kingdom each took a significant number. Unfortunately, Canada only took 23.

The circumstances they face, as the member for Trinity—Spadina pointed out, are very dire. There is no way they can integrate into communities or even earn a living legally in the Philippines. Most of them survive by being street vendors, but are constantly harassed by the police because they do so illegally and outside of the law. It is the only way they can earn a living in the Philippines.

If their children are educated, their educations are not recognized in the Philippines. Even if a child is born in the Philippines to one Filipino parent, that child still does not have status and is considered a stateless person. This is a very dire circumstance.

The Philippine government, while it was very generous at the time of the refugee movement from Vietnam and had significant refugee numbers to deal with, does not see itself as a refugee resettlement country. Canada, Australia and the United States have traditionally been the refugee resettlement countries around the world. That is why I believe Canada should be taking its place and doing its share.

To say that 23 out of 2,000 of this group is Canada's share really sells us short in our commitment to refugee resettlement. It also sells short the Canadians who are ready to do this important work. We know the Vietnamese Canadian community and other Canadians, who are involved in refugee resettlement work, are ready and willing to take on this project.

Routine Proceedings

I hope the government moves immediately, either under the country of asylum class, or a special humanitarian compassionate program or some other mechanism that may not be apparent to me but is apparent to the minister and the department, to get this job done without further delay.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his intervention on the motion before us.

We know other countries have intervened, as he has mentioned. How many people does the member believe Canada can accept? Their lives have been left hanging in the balance, sadly because of perhaps a lack of understanding on how to deal with what is a terrible situation. We know these people are, by any other description, refugees, but somehow our system has not recognized them as such.

Does the member know how many people Canada could accept? Does he know of a creative way of doing this?

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, 125 stateless Vietnamese people remain in the Philippines. Canada should try and resettle all 125 of them. There is no excuse for not making that attempt. There is no excuse for not interviewing these people and determining if there is any way they can resettle in Canada. There are also 27 half-Filipino dependants and they should also be part of that resettlement program.

There is no reason why Canada cannot do this. We need to let the usual criteria of a refugee resettlement program apply, such as health and criminality conditions. When we interview those folks and make decisions about their ability to come to Canada, we must take into consideration their situation and the circumstances in which they have been living.

We should stretch our program to the very limit to allow these 125 people to resettle in Canada. There is no excuse for letting them continue a life that has no future in the Philippines when Canada can easily accommodate them and when Canadians are ready to do the work.

We could get on this immediately and end this sad tale, this sad part of our human history, the war in Vietnam and the huge refugee movement that resulted from it. We can finally close the door on that chapter of human history in a positive way. Canada should step up to the plate and do its job immediately.

• (1530)

Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to address the motion put forward by my colleague from Burnaby—Douglas. I would like to share a slightly different version of what could be called the same story.

Many in this House will remember the fall of Saigon in 1975 when over half a million Vietnamese refugees fled persecution. Over half a million refugees came out of that humanitarian crisis. Canada was very generous in accepting over 140,000 Vietnamese between the late 1970s and the early 1990s. In other words, we accepted almost a quarter of all the refugees of that period while the remaining Vietnamese settled in 70 other countries.

Canada has responded generously to refugees, but the situation in which the Vietnamese in the Philippines find themselves today is

vastly different. The Vietnamese we are talking about today are not refugees and they are not in any danger. Statelessness does not make someone a refugee. A refugee is someone who has a well-founded fear of persecution and who continues to have a valid fear of persecution.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is aware of this population and has determined that they are not refugees, are not persecuted and do not need protection. I think that is an important point to make, that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is aware of this group in the Philippines; he has determined that they are not refugees, that they are not persecuted and that they do not need protection.

The choices and the prospects for this population make them quite different from the plight of true refugees. Those Vietnamese living in the Philippines have opportunities that no other refugee population enjoys. They do have access to education like the rest of the local population. There are no restrictions on their freedom of movement. They are not restricted to refugee camps. They are not refugees and they have never been considered to be refugees. Those who married Filipino nationals and their children from these marriages are eligible for residence and citizenship in the Philippines. Most of the Vietnamese population in the Philippines we are talking about maintain a standard of living similar to that of the Filipino population.

The Government of Canada is committed to providing a safe haven for victims of persecution for genuine refugees.

Refugees are the over 100,000 who have been registered in seven camps in eastern Nepal for over a decade now. Nearly a quarter of them are children born in the camps. Another 10,000 unregistered Bhutanese refugees are living outside the camps. These genuine refugees have been warehoused in camps for more than a decade. The monotony of camp life has amplified their depression, substance abuse, domestic and sexual violence, teenage pregnancies and crime.

Refugees like these face life where up to eight people share one hut. They receive basic food rations available for short term emergencies but inadequate for long term living. The only informal work they can find pays low wages, barely enough to supplement their diet or buy extra clothes. If they are lucky, they may be able to eke out something for education. They have no options of integrating into the local Nepalese community and no hope of returning to Bhutan.

Being stuck in these overcrowded refugee camps with little hope for any solution has taken its toll. Suicide in refugee camps is four times higher than the local Nepalese population.

Refugees are the Muslims from northern Rakhine State in Myanmar who have been in limbo for the past 14 years. Some 28,000 of these refugees, known as Rohingyas, are stuck in two temporary camps in Bangladesh, which were set up in the first place to respond to the emergency back in 1992. The government of Bangladesh will not improve these facilities or allow construction of semi-permanent structures.

Médecins Sans Frontières-Holland and Concern have left these camps and the absence of NGOs has made conditions worse. The protection and security in these camps have steadily deteriorated. Refugees are not allowed to hold meetings among themselves or voice their fears. Corruption is rampant.

Staff from Citizenship and Immigration Canada recently visited the camps and confirmed UNHCR reports that these genuine refugees suffer from malnutrition and poor water and sanitary systems. They are not allowed to leave the camps. They are not allowed to work and they lack education.

Bribery, corruption and sexual violence are common. We hear reports of trafficking of women and children. Refugees are intimidated and occasionally pressured to go home. When they refuse, they are arrested and beaten at random.

• (1535)

Refugees are the Muslim population that has been in limbo for over 15 years in Malaysia. Their children are denied access to public education. Underage marriages are common. Girls are married off to collect a dowry that would reduce the financial burden on families.

Refugees are also the 140,000 Karens in Thailand who face restrictions on education, employment and the right to move out of the camps. Canadian government staff have worked in this camp and have seen the effects of the rampant violence and human rights abuses. We are talking about the rape of young children, the recruitment of child soldiers and the murder of refugees by other refugees.

Refugees are also the 10,000 Eritreans in the Ethiopian Shimelba camp, a camp our immigration officers visit on a regular basis doing resettlement work. Women in this camp routinely face sexual harassment and assault from other ethnic groups.

Refugees are also the 200,000 people in two different camps in Kenya, one in the northern desert on the edge of the Sudan and the other in eastern Kenya where recent floods have forced the evacuation of refugees.

The camp in Dadaab is a warehouse of mostly Somali refugees. In Kakuma, where the average summer temperature is plus 40, the Sudanese have been stuck in camps for over 15 years, and it is home to many thousands of Ethiopians, Congolese, Rwandans and others.

Today's motion calls the Vietnamese community in the Philippines refugees. In the face of true refugees and what they suffer, the government cannot support the motion. Canadians want a refugee system that is humanitarian and there for those desperately in need. This motion does not deliver.

Canadians would be proud to see the compassion that citizenship and immigration officials bring to their work with refugees overseas. Canadians are proud of their government's efforts to maintain our legacy of resettling genuine refugee populations here in Canada.

What would Canadians say about a motion that would delay our vital work with the Rohingyas, the Chin, the Karens, the Sudanese, the Ethiopians and the Congolese, all genuine refugees for whom Canada and Canadians are working to help, to help the Vietnamese population in the Philippines emigrate? This motion would have us

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take resources away from assisting these refugees in order to benefit a community that enjoys choices, education and has hope beyond theirs.

Canada is a compassionate country. In June we announced we were welcoming a group of 810 refugees predominantly of the Karen ethnic group. Since then they have been arriving and settling in towns and cities across Canada from Vancouver to Charlottetown.

The Vietnamese community living in the Philippines simply does not meet any Canadian refugee definition as described in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. In fact, the UNHCR has repeatedly advised the governments of Canada and other countries that the Vietnamese community is quite well settled in the Philippines. They are not seriously or personally affected by civil war. They are not suffering gross violations of human rights. While they might not have legal status, they do not face deportation. They have been locally integrated through marriage to local nationals, through employment and through long term residence. We do not consider these individuals to be in need of protection as refugees.

Furthermore, the Government of Canada does not recognize the Philippines as a nation from which people need to seek refuge. There is no compelling reason that Canada should treat this request differently from other requests for special consideration.

When it comes to refugee determination, I would remind all hon. members that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has repeatedly praised the integrity of Canada's refugee determination system, calling it the best in the world.

The Government of Canada is proud of its record. It will not relax standards for refugee determination based on claims that have more to do with economic aspirations than with the claim of legitimate protection.

This is a difficult issue. I am a member of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. I was at that meeting in May when we met the representatives of this group.

As someone who is relatively new to this file both to issues surrounding immigration and refugees, I can say that it tugs at the heart of anyone who listens to people who would like to move from one place in the world to another place where they can forge a better life for themselves. I think one of the important distinctions that I needed to make very clear in my mind when I started with the committee was the distinction between what is a refugee and what is an immigrant.

Many of us in this House, and in fact many Canadians, do not have to go too far back in their own family trees to find people who came to Canada from other countries to try to make a better life for themselves and their children. My family for the most part came from the British Isles, but even in this House there are people who can trace their ancestry back to countries all over the world.

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There is nothing wrong with being an immigrant. There is nothing wrong with trying to go to a country where people can make a better life for themselves. There is nothing wrong with being an immigrant. Immigrants want to go somewhere where they can make a better life for themselves.

● (1540)

Refugees are quite a different category. Refugees are people who must flee the country where they live because they fear death or persecution. It is very unfortunate that in the world today there are so many people who cannot stay in their homeland, who are forced to leave and who know that they cannot return because they would likely be killed if they returned or certainly they would be tortured if they went back to those places.

I think the distinction between a refugee, who is someone who has left his or her country because he or she must, and an immigrant, who is someone who would like to leave his or her country to seek a better opportunity, is important.

A few moments ago I made it quite clear that according to any generally accepted definition of refugee, the population we are talking about today does not meet that standard. They are not refugees. That does not mean that everything is great in their lives, that there are no problems and there are not things they would like to address. That does not mean they would not like to move to a country like Canada. I expect that around the world there are literally millions of people who, if given the choice, would enjoy coming to live in a country like Canada.

As we often hear in this place, those of us who get to serve in Parliament are very aware of the good fortune we have to be Canadians and to be in Canada. The standard of living we enjoy, the democracy, the freedoms we enjoy are things that people all over the world would love to have for themselves and their families.

I certainly bear no issue with this group of Vietnamese in the Philippines who would like to go to another country, who would like to come to Canada, the United States or somewhere else. That is perfectly understandable. When we heard the group before the committee, as I said, the stories they told were very compelling in terms of why they would like to leave the Philippines. However, there are compelling stories and there are horrifying stories.

Another thing that I have learned in my time in the committee is the truly unbelievable circumstances that some people find themselves in around the world. In my speech I referenced three or four places where people live in truly horrible conditions. They have no options. They cannot even leave the camps and many of them have been in those places for 10 or more years. That is something I think most Canadians could not even imagine for themselves.

I am proud to be a citizen of a country and I am proud to be a member of Parliament in a country where we are trying to do something about that. Canada has done an exemplary job over the years in terms of helping those who need help, in terms of bringing refugees into Canada and resettling them.

The some 140,000 who came to Canada at the time of the Vietnam war are proof of that. As a boy growing up in a small town in central Ontario, which was very rural and not very diverse, I can still

remember when the Vietnamese people showed up in town. I was probably 10 years old at the time. Churches in our community had sponsored Vietnamese refugees and they came and made their home in Haliburton. I remember that because it was probably my first exposure to the role Canada plays in terms of placing refugees in Canada and taking our share of the load.

As I said before, I think the United Nations recognizes the role that Canada plays around the world in terms of refugees. More broadly in terms of immigration, Canada is seen as a world leader. Other countries actually look at what we do. Other countries come to Canada to learn about the way we deal with these different groups of people including refugees.

It is a fair case to make that Canada has been there when refugees are in need, that Canada has done more than its fair share over the years and continues to do more than its fair share. When we are talking about refugees, I think Canada will be there in the future to make sure that as many of these people as possible can be resettled somewhere so they will have a future for themselves.

It is equally important that we draw the distinction clearly in terms of what is a refugee. A compelling case does not a refugee make.

● (1545)

There has been much evidence presented in different places that these people that we are discussing today do not meet the criteria of what are refugees. My colleague from Burnaby—Douglas pointed out that there may be other mechanisms available to the minister.

Canada accepted 36,000 refugees last year. We are active on that file. Over the past few years Canada did make an exception for this group. The government tried to work the immigration criteria to figure out a way to give more of these people a way to get out of their situation. In fact, 23 people from that group did come to Canada.

It is fair to say that Canada has not only met its obligations but has gone beyond its obligations in terms of refugees. I think we have tried under our immigration laws to figure out a way to make that process accessible to as many as possible.

That is why the position of the government today is that these Vietnamese people in the Philippines do not meet the refugee standard. On that basis they cannot be admitted to Canada as refugees.

I think that is the right decision, as difficult as it is. I look forward to the government continuing to work with genuine refugees around the world to ensure that we give as many of them as possible an opportunity to start a new life in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am really bothered by the crocodile tears being shed by my colleague opposite. With all due respect, in his speech he described the suffering of those people he calls genuine refugees, and he listed them. First, since individuals from Eritrea, Nepal, Kenya, Sudan, Somalia and Congo are genuine refugees, I will ask him what his party, presently in power, intends to do to accept more refugees from these countries.

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Next, a definition should not prevent us from helping human beings who have no status in a country and who cannot work, as my colleague from Burnaby—Douglas just stated. We are talking about one hundred people, maybe less.

What I notice is that my colleague is using a definition that is useful but that shows, nonetheless, that this minority Conservative government once again does not wish to address the humanitarian aspect of this matter. It does not wish to look at how it could help a small group of individuals who have been waiting for over 20 years to be reunited with their families in Canada, a country that is so vast and rich and that could, God only knows, take this type of humanitarian, community action.

[*English*]

Mr. Barry Devolin: Mr. Speaker, in terms of what the government intends to do, I think that the Government of Canada intends to continue with the programs that we have in place in Canada. The government continues to welcome refugees into this country at a rate similar to previous years.

Further, as my colleague knows, because she is also a member of the standing committee, we have been hearing witnesses and testimony this fall on the issue of refugees. I know that the minister and the government await the report that will come from the committee with suggestions in terms of what can be done to improve our refugee process in Canada and what can be done to improve the prospects of success for those refugees that do arrive in Canada.

When I spoke earlier, I referenced the member for Burnaby—Douglas who brought this motion forward. I stated the reasons on which the government has based its decision.

In contrast to that member, and in reference to my colleague from the Liberal Party, I suspect that the facts in this case are essentially the same as they were a year ago. It is disingenuous for members of the previous Liberal government to suggest that this is a problem that ought to be fixed, that somehow the solution is obvious, and that the Conservative government should quickly and expeditiously deal with an issue that sat on the docket of their government for some 13 years.

I guess I am less willing to take that suggestion in the spirit of “if we were in charge, this is what we would do”, given the track record of the previous government.

● (1550)

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 1979 when Flora MacDonald was Canada's foreign affairs minister and Joe Clark was prime minister, it was one of Canada's proudest moments. Under a lot of urging from the NDP, from the community, and from churches and synagogues, Canada started the Vietnamese boat people program. It was a proud moment of leadership. I think those Progressive Conservatives would be embarrassed today to listen to what I just heard.

We are talking about 125 refugees. Their lives have been in limbo. They have been forgotten by the world and the Conservative member was just talking about technicalities. How can we become so small that we cannot even accept them as refugees? We have to find a way to accept them. We are talking about 125 refugees. How could we pit one group of refugees living in a refugee camp to

another group of refugees? How could we possibly get to that kind of level in this House?

We have lost our way in both the Liberal and Conservative governments. I recall that this House, under the former Liberal government with the support of the NDP and the Conservatives at the time, agreed to accept these few boat people, but instead of accepting 500, we have accepted 23. The Liberals did not do anything at that time and the Conservatives now are not doing anything. Why are we failing our international obligations? Why are we abdicating our leadership and why are we letting these legitimate refugees flounder?

Mr. Barry Devolin: Mr. Speaker, I made it fairly clear that under the acceptable definitions of what refugees are, this group did not qualify. I am not an immigration lawyer, but it is fairly well accepted that this group of people does not meet the United Nations definition of a refugee. In the preamble to the question which states “these bona fide refugees ought to”, I need to take umbrage with that point.

The second point in terms of what the government should or could do, I said in my speech that Canada has demonstrated over the years a spirit of generosity with many different groups, including refugees. We have done a great deal, possibly more than other country in terms of the size of our population. We have limited resources in this area.

I identified several groups of people around the world who are living in truly deplorable circumstances, so to suggest that by not addressing this group directly that the government has no compassion or that the government does not care about people is unfair. We have demonstrated that. I say to my colleagues in the Liberal Party that the facts of this case have not changed in the last nine months. A series of Liberal ministers reached the same conclusion that the current minister has reached.

This is my second Parliament. I have not been here many years. However, I have had the opportunity to serve both as an opposition member and as a government member. At committee, it is quite evident to me that there are often initiatives brought forward that suggest actions which are not consistent with the policies of Canada or with things we have done in the past. The government is taking its role responsibly to deal with this situation.

● (1555)

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that in a previous Parliament members in his party voted in favour of this action. It is important to put that on the record.

In 1979, when my mother was the mayor of Ottawa, she started Project 4000 and challenged the then Conservative government to accept more than 8,000 refugees. She challenged the citizens of Ottawa to accept 4,000 refugees, which at the time was half of what the quotient was. It went from 8,000 to 50,000. We are talking about 125 people who are stranded. We can—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order. The hon. member for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock.

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Mr. Barry Devolin: Mr. Speaker, I have said on several occasions today that if the argument is that this group ought to be brought to Canada on the basis of the fact that they are refugees, they are not refugees. If they want to come to Canada as economic immigrants, they have the opportunity as do millions of others around the world.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not want to repeat everything that my colleague from Burnaby—Douglas has already said, but I would like to take a few minutes to look back.

In 1975, North Vietnam and South Vietnam were at war. That war created more than a million refugees around the world. Of that number, 500,000 were declared refugees by the UN. Some of those people went to the Philippines, while others went to countries such as the United States and Canada. Canada received the Nansen medal thanks to the actions of previous governments.

Now, there are not 200 people remaining in the Philippines, a country that does not want to accept them as immigrants. According to the figures I have, there are exactly 125 people who took or attempted to take refuge in the Philippines, plus 27 of their dependents. In all, that makes 152 people.

We are taking the time of this House, which represents the people of Canada, to have a discussion and show the Conservative government that these 200 people should be brought here to Canada, where we should welcome them with open arms. Why? They may not be refugees as defined in the Geneva Convention, as my colleague from Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock has said. I do not even want to discuss that. What is important is that these people are living in the Philippines at present and are stateless.

Do we, as Canadians, know what a stateless person is? A stateless person is a person without a country, without legal status, who has no recourse to justice anywhere in the world. A stateless person is someone who, when he or she has rights, does not really have rights. If a stateless person wants to go to hospital, he or she must pay. A stateless person is not entitled to the service that a person with a national status would receive.

His children cannot go to school because he cannot pay taxes. This stateless person cannot work because he does not have a work permit issued by the government of this country. He cannot vote. He cannot participate at all. He cannot make a contribution and integrate into life in this country. This refugee, this stateless person remains, and will always remain, on the fringes of society. The only thing he can see ahead of him is his death as a stateless person. The children of the stateless person also remain stateless. This lack of legal status is transferred from generation to generation.

As long as we are talking about refugees, let us also talk about stateless persons and the conditions they are living under in the Philippines. These people are rejected and abandoned. They work on the black market and do what they can to earn a living.

The opposition parties here in the House of Commons of Canada, decided to look at this issue and decided something needed to be done to bring these people here to Canada to join their friends and family. Let us not forget that this war ended in 1975. It has been almost 30 years. Let us not forget that these stateless persons, in the

Philippines, are 30 years older than they were and therefore not so young. It is time for them to truly find a country to live in where they can become citizens.

In 1989, Canada thought it was a good idea to take in thousands of people from Vietnam and we won the Nansen medal for the role we played. What became of these Vietnamese refugees who came in small boats? They became Canadian citizens. They became integrated into society. They started businesses. They sent their children to school. Since I come from the Montreal area, I want to point out to hon. members that for many years, the children of these refugees went to French school in Montreal and elsewhere. They were at the top of their class, even in French, even though they did not speak a word of French when they arrived here.

• (1600)

These are people who work hard, who really slave. They became Canadian citizens and they too want to show what it is to be a citizen of Canada. They want to reach out to other people who could become citizens. I am not talking about 500,000 people but just the 125 who left Vietnam along with 27 dependents who are now with them. These are not enormous numbers.

The hon. member for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock told us that Canada cannot take any more. I am sorry, but Canada is a big country, a rich country, and most of all, it has always been a generous country. I hope that it will remain a generous country thanks to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

So there are still 152 people. What should the minister do? We are not asking him to break any Canadian laws. We are asking him to find a legal means of speaking out on behalf of Canada and showing the world once again that Canada has a soul, is generous, and is big and rich enough to take 152 people living now in the Philippines.

This is a humanitarian cause. We know that when people are refused refugee status in Canada, they can still ask the minister to be allowed to stay on humanitarian grounds.

I say to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration that these 152 people of Vietnamese origin have been in the Philippines for more than 30 years and want to come and settle here and become Canadians. Can the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration not find humanitarian grounds for accepting them and allowing them to come?

We are not asking the minister to do anything that is against the law, quite the contrary. We are asking him to study these cases in the Canadian spirit and in keeping with Canadian traditions.

That is why we on this side of the House support the motion that was introduced on the 140 Vietnamese refugees who are still stateless in the Philippines and want to come and settle in Canada. I hope very much that the House will pass this motion and put pressure on the minister. I even hope that the minister will not need this pressure and will say on his own and with great generosity that we can find humanitarian grounds for reaching out to these people and accepting them as soon as possible.

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•(1605)

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her work on these issues as the critic for her party on immigration and refugee issues and for her speech.

I want to ask her a question. We heard from the government side that it does not accept the fact that these people are refugees. I certainly do not accept that analysis, as I indicated in my speech, but I want to run this by the member and ask for her comment. The United States has resettled the bulk of the 2,000 people, and in its agreement with the Philippine government, there is an important line. This document was provided to the standing committee.

That document between the United States and the Philippines states:

In an effort to offer resettlement to as many of those in the group as possible, the United States will apply a generous refugee-screening standard when conducting interviews.

Thus, even though it may not have been a strict refugee program, the standards that are being applied are refugee standards. However, when we look at the actual visas that were provided to the folks going to the United States, we see that the first line on the confirmation letters they received states:

Your application for refugee status in the United States has been conditionally approved under S[ection] 207(a) of the United States Immigration and Nationality Act.

Similarly, in Australia when the stateless Vietnamese refugees in the Philippines received their confirmation letters, the first line said:

I refer to your application for Refugee subclass 202 visa, and am pleased to advise that...a decision was taken to grant you and your family that visa.

Clearly the United States and Australia have both made provision in some way to see these people as refugees or to bring them in directly under their refugee programs. I wonder if the member could comment on why Canada cannot make those kinds of provisions as well.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Speaker, I suspect that my colleague is not asking a question, but simply stating an opinion. I agree completely with that opinion. I repeat that we are not asking the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to break the law. It is his responsibility as minister to find a way to bring these people into Canada legally.

What concerns me is what the Conservative Party is saying. It keeps saying that Canada is a country of immigrants, that we have done this and accomplished that. It is always talking about the past. I would like to hear the party in power today talk about the present, about the future and about immigration in the present and the future and not just in the past. In fact, this government gives the impression that immigration is a thing of the past and has no future.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, like the other opposition parties, the Bloc Québécois is calling on the government to support the motion before us. Not only is this an entirely legitimate cause based on Canadian legislation, but it is also an extremely important humanitarian issue.

I heard the Conservative member's speech earlier. Personally, I think they are playing with words. Whether from a strict or lenient perspective, the definition of a person who is entitled to apply for refugee status in Canada states that claimants must "be outside his/her country of citizenship". It has been 30 years since these people have had to leave their country under terrible conditions. As we all know, more than 300,000 died at sea.

The definition of refugees also states that they must have been "affected by civil war or armed conflict". Who does not remember the Vietnam war? We were all affected by this conflict, which ended in the victory of North Vietnam. This led to tragic consequences for many Vietnamese who had chosen to side with the government in place, at that time, in South Vietnam, supported by the United States. I will not go back over the events, but I can assure this House that they formed the backdrop of my youth. I could not say how many anti-war demonstrations we took part in. Even Che Guevara said "Two, Three, Many Vietnams". It was a very difficult conflict.

Another part of the definition of refugees indicates that they are people who have "suffered violations of human rights". Obviously, given Vietnam's situation in 1975, these people had to leave their country, whether for good reasons or bad, and they suffered serious consequences.

The fourth point for consideration as a refugee states "there must be no reasonable prospect within a reasonable period of time, of a durable solution". These individuals have had no status for 30 years. Perhaps, their plight is not as tragic as that of other refugees, but not acknowledging their situation is just playing with words.

The last condition for refugee status speaks of someone "who has obtained private sponsorship". We should remember that the Canadian Vietnamese and Quebec Vietnamese communities were open to sponsoring 200 people. As mentioned, about 23 were able to take advantage of these provisions. There is still the possibility of sponsoring the 120 to 130 remaining individuals.

We twice supported this motion in committee. It seems to me that it is about time we settled the matter once and for all. As you know, there are approximately 2,000 people in the Philippines who have no status. I think it is time to turn the page. Vietnam has changed a great deal since 1975 and Canada has an important responsibility.

I urge the government to show good faith and goodwill and to welcome these remaining stateless Vietnamese refugees presently living in the Philippines.

I believe it is a humanitarian issue, a matter of common sense, and a matter that is within the scope of Canadian law. In this regard, the minister has all the latitude required to bring this matter to a close. I must admit that I am somewhat surprised to see, on the government side, this playing with words and keeping to an extremely strict definition of a refugee. We could quite simply turn the page on one of the tragedies of the modern history of southeast Asia, and of humanity, by welcoming these individuals.

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Thus, we too hope that the motion will be adopted and we even hope that the government will vote in favour of the motion.

•(1610)

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Joliette for his remarks and the generosity of spirit contained in those remarks. I too would put to him a similar sentiment in my riding of Winnipeg Centre which has a large Vietnamese population. In fact, the Saigon Centre is a residential complex that was built in the early 1980s to deal with the influx of people who came with this very group of refugees who were called the “boat people”.

One of my staff, Nguyen Vân, the immigration specialist for my office, comes from that background herself, although she and her family were stranded for two years in Hong Kong after having been boat people from Vietnam and were accepted into Canada as refugees even though they went to that safe third country first. They did not come directly from Vietnam.

I would argue that the only difference between this group of 125 people who remain from the original refugees and Nguyen Vân and her family is the difference between being sidelined or waylaid by two years or twenty years. It makes no difference. This is a job that is incomplete. This is a national project that Canada took on with great pride and with great purpose and it is left undone. There is a lingering element.

I would like to simply say, by way of a comment, that the people of the riding of Winnipeg Centre would welcome and could easily accommodate these 125 people in my riding alone. I would be honoured if we could find a way.

We know the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration has unlimited flexibility. He has discretionary powers that are worrisome sometimes. He could show the flexibility in the definition of refugee and we could open our arms to this remaining 125 people. As I say, the people of my riding would welcome them all. They could easily be accommodated in the riding of Winnipeg Centre.

•(1615)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question and comments. I share his sentiments because I was teaching at the Collège de Maisonneuve when that wave of refugees, the boat people, was accepted. At the college I taught many children from these families. From 1978 to 1981, the Vietnamese accounted for one-quarter of the refugees accepted in Canada every year.

It is now 30 years later, but we could very easily have taken them 25 or 30 years ago. It is just playing with words, and as the hon. member said, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration has the power under subsection 25(1) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act to grant permanent residency on humanitarian grounds. According to this subsection, the minister:

may grant ... permanent resident status or an exemption from any applicable criteria or obligation of this Act if the Minister is of the opinion that it is justified by humanitarian and compassionate considerations.

It seems to me that we have a case here that should not even need debating. Once again, I hope that the House will give unanimous consent and pass this motion.

[*English*]

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, could the member shed some personal experience on the issue that we are discussing?

Many of the people in my community of Surrey who came here from Vietnam are the economic drivers in our community. They own restaurants, hair styling parlours and make investments in the community.

When people say that governments are inflexible, this is a perfect example of what makes people say it is inflexible. People can see this and understand these people who have been disenfranchised for so long.

I heard the government member say that the government did not have the resources. I wonder if the member could comment on, in his experience with the people from Vietnam, whether it would take great resources to bring those people to this country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question.

We in Quebec have very strong ties with the Vietnamese community. I think that this was mentioned a little while ago.

Indochina was a French colony and some Vietnamese in the older generations still spoke French. In addition, many of the Vietnamese who settled here after the boat people tragedy integrated extremely well into Quebec society with its common language of French because they already had these roots. Vietnam is also in the international Francophonie.

I think, therefore, that we have an ideal opportunity here from all points of view to solve a humanitarian problem that has been dragging on, unfortunately, for far too long.

[*English*]

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada is a very big country and if we were to accept 1% of immigrants and refugees into our country, it could be as many as 330,000 people. This year the Conservative government set a target of only 260,000. In the mind the hon. member, I want to know whether, in a country so large, he sees any problem accepting 125 Vietnamese refugees who have been stateless for over 16 years.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question. We have indeed seen in the past that these Quebecers and Canadians of Vietnamese origin integrate very easily into a society that welcomes them. They make a great contribution. That is very obvious.

Routine Proceedings

As I was saying, I had an opportunity to teach some of the children of the boat people. They managed to adapt very quickly. In this regard, therefore, they were far from a burden on Canadian and Quebec society. It would actually be enriching to have them and this would simply be the completion of the openness that Canada and Quebec showed nearly 20 years ago now.

Let us just do it and get on with other tragedies. There are too many of them, unfortunately, in this world.

● (1620)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst, Employment Insurance; the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina, Citizenship and Immigration.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in joining this debate, I would like to respond to the member for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock who spoke for the government.

Having been on the citizenship and immigration committee since 1998, I recognize speeches written by bureaucrats, who are exactly the people who wrote that speech. I refused to give some of those speeches when I was parliamentary secretary to the minister of citizenship immigration because I believed that as a member of Parliament I had an obligation to the House, as well as to my constituents, the country and my fellow members of Parliament.

The member made the comment that it was disingenuous for people on this side to criticize the government because we were in government before. The record will show that in previous Parliaments when the Liberals were in government, we supported settling this question about the Vietnamese boat people. I might also say to the member that the Conservatives also supported it.

When the bureaucrats came to the committee, Daniel Jean spoke to the committee and said that the government would try to deal with this. I remember the critic, the hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill, saying the following:

Thank you, gentlemen, for your information to the committee.

The committee is pleased, I believe it's fair to say, with this reversal by the government of their long-standing objection to resettling these Vietnamese who were without status in the Philippines. However, the devil is always in the details, isn't it?

We are finding out that is the case. The point I want to make is that the Conservative members of the committee supported it, as did the Liberals, the New Democrats and the Bloc. There was general support in the committee to make this happen.

I have another issue I want to focus on. We often talk about cooperating with our allies or other folks to make things happen. We started off with 2,000 people who needed to be resettled. Australia, a smaller country than ours, took in 256 people. Our allies to the south took many more. The United Kingdom took some and Norway resettled some.

We are talking about a relatively small number but the significance of it is huge. It is huge because we would get to wrap up the adventure we began back in 1975 when we dealt with the Vietnamese boat people, as well as people from Cambodia and the

Laotians. Canada did a very admirable job. It took in over 20% of all the Vietnamese boat people, Cambodians and Laotians who needed to be resettled. This is an opportunity for us to wrap it up. We are talking about 125 plus 27 who were born in the Philippines and who have a mixed heritage of Philippine and Vietnamese.

I have been here since 1998 and the only consistent thing has been the department's opposition to some of these issues.

● (1625)

The situation is fairly simple. The minister has all the power to make this happen. It does not take a lot. He can sign off on it very quickly. He could go through the criminality and health checks to satisfy himself that these people would meet those criteria. All it takes is a little political will.

Unfortunately, and this I find has been a problem, immigration and citizenship is not a big priority for the government. It had a very able candidate for the position in the member for Calgary—Nose Hill, who was their critic. She understood the department. The Conservatives also had a number of members, such as the member from Edmonton, who served on the committee for a long period of time. They had expertise to put in the position as minister.

The Prime Minister chose not to do that. He picked a member who had absolutely no exposure to citizenship and immigration issues. He may be a fine member, but he was put in charge of a department without any prior experience in the portfolio. The same thing is true for the position of parliamentary secretary.

We have the Prime Minister appointing people to the position of minister and parliamentary secretary, people who have no previous experience in the department. Why would the Prime Minister not give priority to something as important as citizenship and immigration, which affects so many Canadians in the country?

I want to get back to the 152 people about whom we are talking. There is absolutely no excuse. If the government had not changed the members of the government on the committee, the committee would not be parroting the line handed to them by the bureaucrats or by their whip. They would be still pushing to resettle this group of people, where we only have 152 people left out of a group of about 2,000.

Let me get back to the previous Liberal government when it dealt with this issue. I mentioned that the committee members, and the member for Burnaby—Douglas will know this, oftentimes did not go the way that the parliamentary secretary would have gone or the government might have wanted to go. The members on the committee used their best judgment upon hearing the evidence, keeping in mind they were parliamentarians. When we sit on committees, it is our job to hold the bureaucracy accountable as well as the government.

This is one area where I am sad to say the Conservative government has really been failing. If we check the minutes of the committee meetings and if we look at the voting pattern of the members on the government side, it is unanimously one position. We can tell this by the way the parliamentary secretary votes.

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In the previous Parliament, when the Liberals were in government, the parliamentary secretary did not dominate the committee in terms of speaking time. The time then was shared by all the members. Now we have a parliamentary secretary who essentially dominates the speaking time on behalf of the government. Instead of allowing committees to work, we have a situation where the government line is put out and pushed. This inhibits the committee from doing its job either holding the government or the bureaucracy accountable. That is unfortunate.

• (1630)

The Vietnamese Canadian community is a very viable one in Canada. One of the real pleasures one gets being in committee is hearing presentations from Canadians from across the country. We all have members of the Vietnamese Canadian community in our ridings. My colleague from Winnipeg said that he would like to have them all go to his riding.

When we travelled across the country and talked on the issue of immigration and citizenship, one of the things we heard, universally, was that we needed more immigrants. When we were in the Maritimes, we heard that undocumented workers seemed to be a problem to the government, that it was trying to get rid of them on a daily basis. They wanted them to relocate there because they were desperate for people to settle in their communities. Canadians have recognized that immigration population growth leads to more economic activity and prosperity. This has not been happening.

As I mentioned, we have a very viable Vietnamese community. I hope it keeps pushing this issue in the communities. Governments being unresponsive and making decisions of this type have to be held accountable.

When I came here in 1993 as a new member of Parliament, I sat on the government side of the House and Reform Party members sat on the other side. They said that they came here because they wanted to do what was right by their constituents. They said that they wanted to vote the way their constituents instructed them to vote. Sadly, that bit of innovation has disappeared. We now have the Conservative Party and members vote the way they are told. If they dare vote their conscience, or for that matter vote as instructed by their constituents, they quickly find themselves out the door. I think the public is fast becoming aware of this flip-flop.

The reality is we are dealing with a small issue here. We are talking about 152 people and wrapping up the whole Vietnam boat experience, which was a traumatic event in many of our lives. We could also give closure to those Canadians of Vietnamese background who went through that experience. They see that the people in the Philippines are suffering. They are stateless and cannot settle anywhere. They are often harassed by the police. They are shaken down for bribes.

For the psychological well-being of our Vietnamese Canadian community, we need to wrap this up. We need to do our part with the United States, the United Kingdom, Norway and Australia. Right now we are not doing that. It will not take any great deal of work on the part of the government to make this happen. The minister could very easily sign one piece of paper saying we want these people. This is exactly what we should be doing. We should be wrapping this up if we want to maintain our reputation.

In 1975 we did great work with the boat people and the Vietnamese community. We did it because the Canadian public in many ways demanded that we do it. About this time 50 years ago, the Hungarian revolution wound down and people were displaced. They went to Austria. It was the reaction of Canadians that drove the government to action.

• (1635)

We have to recapture the spirit of those times because, ultimately, not that many things have to divide us when it comes to humanitarian activity. I think we would find overwhelming consensus across the country that people would want to see this chapter closed, that they would want those people to be given an opportunity to come to Canada and, as I said, close the book on that chapter. It would not take very much at all.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the member opposite and his plea on behalf of refugees. From personal experience from the seventies, we worked personally with dozens of refugees who came to Canada at that time. Many church groups sponsored these refugees and cared for their needs. I had the privilege of caring for many of the dental needs that presented themselves at that time. Canada is a generous country and Canadians are generous people. I think we all want to see refugees looked after.

A couple of questions were raised as the member spoke, and I wonder if he could address them.

First, he says there are 152 people. That seems like a small enough number that we could easily absorb. During the time the member's government was in office, why did the minister not finish the job and get it done, as he said?

Second, how many applications have been received for private sponsorships of these people, those who we are discussing today?

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Speaker, my understanding is there are always more people ready to provide private sponsorships than there are refugees who are allowed into the country. This has been a problem over the years. The community said that they would come forward and they would deal with the sponsorship on those.

I am glad that the member asked that question because we really have to push the government, and he is in the governing party, to ensure that we meet the numbers. We only do about half of what we could in terms of the number of sponsorship groups out there.

The other issue is about the previous government starting on it, but it not finishing it. However, if we were still government, our members would be pushing very hard to ensure that was done.

The member should go forward in caucus, raise this issue and try to push the minister and the Prime Minister by saying this is something that he would like to wrap up. Hopefully that will happen. I know the member was involved in this whole movement on the Vietnamese refugees, as were all the communities. It would be nice if we could wrap this up, make it happen and win one for the refugees instead of the bureaucrats.

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•(1640)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is worth noting that we are not having some academic exercise here. If the will of Parliament means anything, as of tomorrow, we will have a vote on this issue. I predict, given the speeches I have heard, that the majority of the members of Parliament present will approve these 125 people, that they will be deemed or classed whatever is necessary for our refugee laws and rules to apply to them and be welcomed into our country. It would be a wonderful thing, as we enter into this holiday season. What better expression of goodwill could there be than for us to tap into the spirit of generosity that led to our acceptance of the original waves early on and to conclude that sentiment by finishing the job with this 125 remaining people?

My only comment is, and I think my colleague will agree, the members of the government side said that they were already doing a great deal for refugees in welcoming roughly 35,000 this year. Would my colleague from Kitchener agree that the vast majority of those are not really refugees from camps? The vast majority are those who find their way to our shores one way or another, free of persecution. They come here in a way that is not managed in any meaningful way. We only get about 8,000 to 10,000 per year who are languishing in refugee camps and waiting their turn to be welcomed into the welcoming countries.

Would my colleague agree that we are doing very little in actual managed intake of refugees internationally and that this 125 would not push us over some threshold of what we could tolerate?

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member that we can do that, and we can do a lot more. One of the problems we have, and which we do not talk about when we talk about refugees and immigration, is that we are not doing it just to be charitable or just to be nice. The fact of the matter is that immigration is the economic lifeblood of this country. It has been in the past and it helped build the country, and it is going to continue to be in the future.

I see a time when we will not be getting all the numbers that we think we can because we are in competition with other countries. We are going to find out that some of the practices we now have will impair our future ability to meet targets. We are going to lose out to other countries, particularly for the ones we really go after, because those other countries do a much better job of attracting immigrants.

The fact of the matter is that refugees contribute to this country. These folks could be absorbed very quickly into the economy. It just does not make any sense in terms of the amount of time we have spent debating this issue. We should have made it happen a long time ago, but this is an opportunity, and I hope the government listens.

As for the 152 people, I love the comparison to the Christmas season. I think it would be a wonderful gift, wrapping up this story of the Vietnamese boat people and giving a real present to the Vietnamese Canadian community in terms of a victory that they so richly deserve, and we would all win.

Hon. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among all the parties and I think if you seek it you would find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, when debate ends on the motion currently being debated, that is, concurrence in the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, the question be deemed put and the vote deferred to tomorrow, Tuesday, December 12, after oral questions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

•(1645)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to return for just a moment to a point that was made earlier in terms of the 152 people to whom we would like to open our borders. Certainly my heart says yes, we should open our border, but considering that the member was sort of denigrating the officials in the department for having a stand on some of these issues, someone needs to make an evaluation as to whether or not these people are refugees. The UN High Commissioner has indicated that these people are not facing persecution or many of the factors that qualify people for refugee status.

Is the hon. member prepared to look into the eyes of those people who are not going to be allowed to come in and who are currently experiencing persecution? We know there is a large waiting list, and we are not even able to meet that at this point. Could the member respond to that?

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member is talking about an artificial number in terms of the number of refugees we accept. We can accept a lot more than we are accepting. There are tens of thousands of variants that can happen within our immigration package, in our total numbers. It is the same as the situation with the refugee numbers.

I thought it was unfair of the member previously in trying to compare the misery of various groups. I am essentially saying that really it would cost us very little. We could do it very quickly, and very quickly the refugees would be contributing to the Canadian economy, making our communities stronger economically and socially.

However, I really have a problem when we start comparing misery over here with misery over there. The fact of the matter is that the problem has been solved to a large extent. There were 2,000 to start with. That number is down to 150. Other countries did their part. This gives us an opportunity to do our part, close the chapter on that particular experience and continue to work with the refugees we can take in.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to advise you that I will be sharing my time with the member for Trinity—Spadina.

If I may take a moment to be personal about this issue, it was in 1979 when my mother was the mayor of Ottawa that she engaged with our community here in Ottawa to seek to have the number of Vietnamese refugees in Ottawa increased from what was a paltry number to 4,000. Just to give members an indication, at that time, the number Canada had identified for Vietnamese boat people refugees was 8,000. She said she thought Ottawa could take at least 4,000 and she engaged with this community to do just that.

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It was quite a time. I was a teenager living at home. It was a very interesting time. Our phone number was listed in the public directory and not everyone saw this as a positive idea at the time. In fact, I remember picking up the phone numerous times when people were giving feedback to my mother and saying that they did not think it was a good idea. They thought those people would take jobs away from others. They thought they did not deserve to be here, et cetera.

However, our community rose above that. At the time, the debate was about how many we could take. As my mother will say to anyone who tells her that this was an amazing thing she did, she will say, very simply, "No, I didn't do it. The community here in Ottawa did".

What happened was that in the spring of 1979 my mother and father were in a small town outside Ottawa for meetings. It was awful weather and they spent the evening watching TV and seeing the absolute horror that many of these boat people were suffering, subject to pirates on the sea and living in absolute vulnerability of the worst kind. My mother and father, having a long history of working for social justice in the Catholic church, looked at each other and said, "There is something we have to do. What can we do?" Upon their return, they phoned various friends in the community and in faith communities and said that they thought they could organize something to open up our community to the Vietnamese.

That is what happened. When we travel down Bank Street today we find ourselves at Frank Clair Stadium at Lansdowne Park. My mother and father opened it up and invited all the members of the community to come in, sign up and sponsor the Vietnamese. That is exactly what happened. Within hours, the people of Ottawa filled that quota.

A very interesting thing happened. Once my mother had gone forward to the media with the challenge that Ottawa was providing to the federal government, she got a call the very next day from the mayor of Calgary, who said that Calgary could do better than that and would take 5,000. This kind of thing went on right across the country. What happened in the end was that we went from having planned to have 8,000 Vietnamese to having 50,000 within a matter of weeks.

The government of the day was a Conservative government. That bears repeating because what we have in front of us today is a simple challenge to honour the history of all of those Canadians who opened up their doors, their hearts and their minds to the Vietnamese at the time and said, "We welcome you".

All we are asking today is that we finish that and that the 152 people who right now are languishing in the Philippines are going to be welcome in this country. That is all we are asking. They are refugees. They did not go to the Philippines because they were on holidays. They went to the Philippines because they were leaving a war-torn country. They were left on the sea.

I do not accept and Canadians do not accept this semantic debate around whether they are refugees or not. They left their country because they are refugees. Those members did not accept that when they were on committee. That party did not accept it then. They should not accept it now. We must honour the lives and the

memories of those people and the people living in Canada who opened up their doors, their minds and their hearts.

• (1650)

When we look at this motion, we see that it is very simple. It asks that we do what the United States, Australia and Norway have done, and simply open our doors, our minds and our hearts for 125 people. It does not mean that we are going to change the manner in which all refugees are looked at. It simply means that we acknowledge there is a nuance here. That is exactly what the Americans did. That is exactly what the people of Australia did through their government. That is exactly what Norway did.

Friends of mine from the Vietnamese community, such as Mr. Can Le, a pioneer in helping people come to Ottawa, often ask me what happened in Parliament today and what the members and the government say when we ask that 152 people come here from the Philippines to finish off what we started in this community. Mr. Can Le was here as a Vietnamese refugee, but came earlier, as an immigrant, and opened his door to his fellow Vietnamese.

When he asks me what we did here, I want to say to him that we voted unanimously to pass this motion to make sure that the end of this piece of history is not regarded in dismay because we were not imaginative enough to do something about it. I want us to be able to say that we rose to the occasion just like we did in 1979 in this community and this country and we showed the world what we are all about. I encourage all members to pass this motion and to do it unanimously.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Ottawa Centre for putting the argument so clearly before the House of Commons. I would ask him to elaborate somewhat on a point made by my colleague from Kitchener—Waterloo in saying that we are not asking Canada for any great sacrifice here. In fact, it is to our benefit when people choose to come to Canada. We rarely meet our immigration quotas. We fall short of even our own immigration targets. I should use the word "targets", not quotas. We want 1% or 310,000 per year. That would be optimal. We rarely get 250,000 newcomers to Canada.

I know the answer for my own riding of Winnipeg Centre: I would welcome those 125 or 152 Vietnamese all coming to my riding. Could he see the economic benefit of perhaps a share of them going to Ottawa Centre as well?

• (1655)

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, a little competition is a good thing. I would want to take all 152, but I am willing to share and I may see the member halfway. In terms of the economic viability of my community of Ottawa Centre if the Vietnamese refugees had not come here, my riding, the community of Ottawa Centre, and centretown would be less well off. If we were to tour Somerset Street and in and around that community, we would find people who have created their own small businesses. We would find people who are presently working in the public service, making sure that we have decent and very well supported public services. We will have to take a tour of that area soon.

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Not only is this proposal something that will benefit and enhance our community, it is indeed something that has already been done. It is a proven project. That is why I cannot understand why we would not continue on. I know that to a person the members of the Vietnamese community would welcome the 152 people, so it is not a question of whether there is a place for them to go or of resources that are needed. The resources are here: they are the citizens within our country.

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the speech by the member for Ottawa Centre. I want to echo it, in that the immigration from Vietnam to the region of Ottawa-Carleton, as it was then, has been a great benefit to this country. It is something that has affected the face of this country.

What made the Vietnamese immigration so positive was the great community effort, whether it was church groups, businesses or service clubs that would take in families. One member of the club or the church would help the kids get settled in school. Another would help get the families set up in an apartment. Another would help get the parents enrolled in English as a second language training. It took that great community support to come together. The member's mother, then the mayor of Ottawa, Marion Dewar, had a lot to do with that.

What we have to do with our immigration settlement is try to provide seed money in support so we can have more of that. One of the things in which Ontario has been disadvantaged is that we have not had our fair share of immigration settlement dollars. I was very pleased to see that in the budget this year a government has finally, instead of talking about it, begun to establish some fairness. Hopefully we will see much better settlement of immigrants in the province of Ontario, immigrants who can enjoy what immigrants in other provinces have.

That was a good speech by the member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, I wish we would have seen the money from the present budget. I understand there is a bit of a logjam between the two levels of government. Moreover, I think the experience of my mother, Marion Dewar, with the Vietnamese boat people suggests that we need to never ever take our eyes off the details and the importance of supporting those agencies which quite frankly, we get for next to nothing in terms of the money we put in and what we get back.

Finally, I am encouraged to hear my colleague's comments. I hope that he supports the motion that will be put in front of the House tomorrow. It would be a wonderful thing to see unanimity on this motion.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in my riding of Trinity—Spadina we are home to thousands of immigrants and refugees, people who have come from around the world to contribute to Canada and make this country a better place. Among the refugees, now citizens of Canada, are some of the original Vietnamese boat people who began coming here 25 years ago when Canada opened its doors.

In fact, I have a long history with them. I was a fine arts student and did not really know much about going to rallies, petitioning or anything. In 1979 there was a member of Parliament, Dan Heap,

who with a group of people organized a big demonstration in a park in Toronto's Chinatown. It was pouring rain. It was my first political demonstration to ask the Canadian government to accept these Vietnamese boat people.

I certainly had my start in political life by working with Vietnamese boat people. After I graduated I became a counsellor assisting some of these refugees to settle in Canada. It was not a hard job at all because they settled very easily.

I was extremely proud at that time. Canada's first foreign minister, who happened to be a woman at that time, was Flora MacDonald, a great Canadian humanitarian. Joe Clark was the prime minister of a minority government. We as Canadians had the courage to accept a large number of Vietnamese refugees.

How ashamed Joe Clark must be today of the Conservative minority government that abandoned the progressive name and the progressive principles that Flora MacDonald stood for. How ashamed they must be of the current Conservative foreign minister who was the last leader of the Progressive Conservative Party. I believe that it is a betrayal of a proud Canadian legacy.

Many years ago Canada proudly accepted Vietnamese boat people, or a great number of them, and it was a great act of humanitarianism. Those boat people have been grateful to Canada. In downtown Trinity-Spadina many businesses have been created by them. It is a vibrant community because of these immigrants. After Joe Clark's minority government, Liberal majorities and then Conservative majorities started to betray these principles. Instead of aspiring to greatness, we became gradually small minded. Instead of throwing open our doors to the world, we began to close them and we began narrow selections of smaller numbers of immigrants.

Under all of these successive Liberal governments our immigration and refugee system was neglected and it started failing Canada. It is failing us on economic grounds and it is failing us on humanitarian grounds.

However, we now have a chance to live up to our obligation to the last remaining boat people, to make good on that promise in which Canadians rejoiced in over 25 years ago. We had the support of all parties in the House, but the former Liberal government did not manage to take in the 500 people. It only took in a small number. Now the Conservative government seems to be hiding behind technicalities. It is defining refugees narrowly and indicating that because people put their lives on hold for close to a generation that they no longer qualify.

These people are stateless and have no rights. They had the expectation that Canada was serious when we opened our doors. They are now disappointed and over the last 16 years some of them have married Filipino spouses. The official argument was that these people would be able to apply for legal status in the Philippines. Thus, they would not be considered stateless, but under the Filipino law, the refugees came to the Philippines illegally and therefore would not be eligible for legal residents.

Therefore, these unfortunate people are caught between the laws of two countries. Some ask, why did these Vietnamese not return to their country of origin once they discovered it was so difficult to settle anywhere else?

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• (1700)

Some would argue that refugees from other parts of the world also suffer and ask what makes these Vietnamese refugees so special. My question is, when did we start taking our shared sense of humanity so low? Instead of offering a helping hand, we start questioning which set of refugees suffer more than others and pondering why they did not return to where they came from. These people obviously left their country, leaving their belongings and families behind. They risked their lives and everything they had when they left their own country and some people say they were not really refugees.

It is easy for us, who live comfortably in Canada, to debate about the fate of these refugees and whether they are refugees or not. It is their lives we are talking about. It could be the lives of our forefathers and foremothers. They have survived all this time and still remain hopeful that somehow someone will hear their cries.

I believe that we absolutely have to take action. We have to find a way to bring these people to our country. Where is the national pride in denying the remaining boat people a home here? Where is the national pride in this pettiness of the definition? Surely it is time for Canada to show leadership as a great and good country, or is the current government more intent on spending money on military missions that may end up creating a whole new generation of refugees?

Let us keep our priorities straight. Let us hope that the House is unanimous in supporting this motion allowing the government to act positively.

• (1705)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague, the member for Trinity—Spadina, for recognizing the former member for her riding, Mr. Dan Heap, an NDP colleague who one could certainly count on to be at the front of this national issue.

The 1979 treatment of the Vietnamese boat people refugee crisis was probably a picture of Canada at its finest. It was one of its proudest moments in the way that my colleague, the member for Ottawa Centre, outlined how it became almost a competition between cities as to which could be more generous in the best possible spirit of international responsibility.

In the context of how we should view this opportunity and not as a nuisance or act of charity, there is great competition for immigration numbers around the world. We rarely meet our targets for immigration. Other countries know as well that immigration, being an engine for economic growth, is a net plus for all of us.

I have a question for the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina. Could we not encourage the government to see that this is not a nuisance and not charity? There is an enlightened self-interest associated with having 150 new easily integrated hard-working immigrants who would benefit our communities.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, I mentioned earlier that Canada has a declining birth rate. There have been fewer children born in the last 10 years. I believe it dropped from 4 million kids under 10 to 3.6 million. We need more families, children, immigrants and refugees. That is a decline of 14%. As a country we absolutely need more people. We are talking about 400,000 kids.

We need more immigrants because we know that every immigrant coming into the country creates at least 1.2 jobs in Canada. Certainly, in my riding of Trinity—Spadina I see that the Vietnamese people have done tremendously well. They are in every type of business. They are not just merchants. They own a lot of different types of companies and are very good business folks. They work very hard and their children excel in school. They are contributing tremendously.

I have no doubt the 152 Vietnamese who are still in the Philippines would be able to contribute tremendously to Canada if we allowed them to come here. If the member for Winnipeg Centre is willing to take some Vietnamese refugees in Winnipeg, I am sure the city of Toronto could take a share and probably Burnaby would too.

• (1710)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to address the House and question the member with regard to the immigration committee's report and the concurrence motion therein.

The government has moved swiftly to set up a secretariat to help with the recognition of foreign credentials: people who come to Canada well trained, well educated, and ready to put their skills to work to build on the Canadian dream. They are held up because oftentimes their credentials are not recognized here on Canadian soil.

The government is moving swiftly to set up a secretariat that will help lead to the recognition of those credentials, so that Canadian immigrants can live out the Canadian dream and contribute in a maximum way to the Canadian quality of life.

Does the member support the initiatives of the government to enhance the recognition of foreign credentials and to build on the opportunities that immigrants in this country are provided?

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, swiftly is not the word I would use. I would say very slowly.

The government is now talking. The Conservatives promised \$18 million to set up a central agency. At most \$2 million has been spent right now for consultations, for talking, while we have taxi drivers with many degrees. We could have invested some of that money to bridge programs, create a mentorship program and actually set up a portal, a website and a one stop shop. We could do all of that.

Instead, \$16 million is sitting in the budget for next year. Hardly anything is being done, other than talk and hot air. I would not call that dealing swiftly with a foreign credential program.

Routine Proceedings

I come back to the issue in front of us. Many folks stuck in the Philippines have no hope. They cannot find any way for any of their credentials to be recognized. When their kids go to school, guess what, their degrees, or never mind degrees, any kind of a certificate is not being recognized by the Philippine government, the Vietnamese government or the Canadian government, even though they have been in school for some time. These people have absolutely no sense of hope in the Philippines. That is why we need to bring them to Canada.

The Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Speaker: Pursuant to order made earlier this day, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, December 12, 2006 at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions.

[*Translation*]

The House will now continue with the remaining business under routine proceedings.

* * *

PETITIONS

VOLUNTEERISM

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I want to present a petition signed by more than 1,500 Canadians from across Canada, including some from my riding of Laval—Les Îles in Quebec, in favour of Canadian youth volunteering in Canada and abroad. These people from Laval, just like the many other signatories of this petition, are calling on Parliament to enact legislation or take measures that will allow all young Canadians who wish to do so to serve in communities as volunteers at the national or international levels.

The text of the petition says: “it would be difficult for Canada to argue that non-governmental organizations continue to turn away thousands of young volunteers each year due to a lack of funds”.

In its response, the Conservative government should explain to these thousands of petitioners why it eliminated nearly \$10 million from the Canadian volunteerism initiative when the government has a budgetary surplus of \$13 billion.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure to present a petition signed by over 1,200 Canadians.

The petitioners express their concern about the lack of resources provided for young Canadians who want to volunteers. The petitioners say, among other things, that several tens of thousands of young Canadians want to serve the community as volunteers here or abroad. Many of them are denied this opportunity due to the lack of government funds provided for non-governmental organizations that offer these types of programs to young Canadians.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to enact legislation that will allow all young Canadians who wish to do so to serve in

communities as volunteers at the national or international levels. It is my pleasure to present this petition on their behalf.

* * *

● (1715)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Question No. 113 will be answered today.

[*Text*]

Question No. 113—**Ms. France Bonsant:**

Regarding the cuts announced by the government in the area of youth employment: (a) which programs are affected by the cuts; (b) what is the extent of the cuts by program; (c) how will the summer career placements program be affected; (d) how will the skills link program be affected; and (e) how will the career focus program be affected?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the youth employment strategy, YES, helps young people, particularly those facing barriers to employment, get the information and gain the skills, work experience and abilities they need to make a successful transition to the workplace.

YES includes three streams of program, namely skills link, career focus and summer work experience. The skills links and career focus programs were not affected by the announced reductions

The summer career placement, SCP, initiative, which is a component of the summer work experience, provides wage subsidies to employers to create career related summer employment opportunities for students 15 to 30 years of age inclusively.

In budget 2006, we promised to review our programs to ensure every taxpayer dollar spent achieves results, provides value for money and meets the needs of Canadians.

When this government examined the spending in the summer career placement programs, we found that many employers would have provided these jobs even if they did not receive one cent of funding.

Canada's new government will instead focus funding where students need help, whether it is in rural communities, for new Canadians, or targeted at other barriers for employment. We will help students where they actually need it.

Recently, we announced a budget reduction for SCP of \$10.4 million in 2006-07 and \$45 million in 2007-08. As a result, the program will be re-focused on students who need it the most because of where they live or the barriers they face.

The effect of our new program will be known when we evaluate the 2007 summer career placements applications.

I assure the member that the department will honour its ongoing commitment to help youth in need make the transition to the labour market.

S. O. 52

The SCP initiative will continue to assist students in obtaining employment. In early 2007, employers will be invited to submit applications for creating summer employment. These applications will be assessed using a transparent, rigorous assessment process to ensure the initiative responds to students who need it most.

* * *

[*English*]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Question No. 111 could be made an order for return, this return would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Text*]

Question No. 111—**Ms. Denise Savoie:**

With respect to government spending on workplace skills: (a) to what year(s) was the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development referring in her statement in the House on September 29, 2006, specifically “we are spending over \$2 billion a year in developing workplace skills”; and (b) what is the precise government spending in developing workplace skills from 2004-05, broken down by program, in each province and territory?

(Return tabled)

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand?

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

HOMELESSNESS

The Speaker: The Chair has received two requests for an emergency debate. The first is from the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie and I will hear him now.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have a homeless crisis on our hands in Canada that requires the House's immediate attention. I have been across the country over the past month and the situation is alarming.

In Toronto, 30,000 people are visiting shelters. In Calgary, which has only 1,800 shelters, 3,400 people are looking for shelter. In Vancouver, 2,200 people are looking for a home. In Ottawa, 1,000 are looking for a home. In Victoria, over 700 people are looking for shelter and only 25% of the people living in shelters are working.

There is not enough affordable housing stock and the existing stock is crumbling. We now have the alarming emergence of diseases, such as TB and pneumonia, and an infestation of bed bugs in Vancouver and Toronto.

We have been faced with emergencies, such as floods, ice storms and fires, many times in this country where lives have been put at risk. Will the Speaker, at the very minimum, have an emergency

debate in this House about this alarming and tragic circumstance that is happening in our country?

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I appreciate the comments the hon. member has made and I am sure the House appreciates the seriousness of the situation. I am not convinced, however, that the situation meets the exigencies of the Standing Order in respect of an emergency debate at this time. Accordingly, I will decline to allow the debate that the hon. member has requested.

The second request is from the hon. member for Malpeque.

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am seeking, again, under provisions of Standing Order 52, leave for an emergency debate concerning the impact recent actions and decisions taken by the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food have had on the functioning of the Canadian Wheat Board and its reputation abroad.

Mr. Speaker, I believe your previous ruling was, in part, due to the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food coming before you but that report really only deals with the specifics of a question for a plebiscite.

The need for the emergency debate is all the more important today because last night the results of the Canadian Wheat Board director elections were announced and 80%, four out five, of the pro-Wheat Board directors were in fact elected. Later this week, under directive from the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food is intending to fire the CEO of the Canadian Wheat Board, a man with some 33 years experience in the grain industry. As was said during question period today, the man was really the chief salesperson for Canadian grain sales abroad. It throws into jeopardy our reputation in the international community and our credibility in grain markets. It is a very serious matter.

Let me conclude my request with a glaring statement made the other day by the CEO himself:

...I have been asked to pledge support for the government's policy of eliminating the single desk, barring which I will be removed from my job. It would seem to me that opposition to the single desk should be far better grounds for my dismissal than unwavering support for the laws of Canada.

Let me put it simply. The CEO has been asked by the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, even though pro-Wheat Board directors were elected this weekend and eight out ten of those directors have full confidence in the CEO, to either break the law and keep his job or maintain the law and lose his job. That is no choice. I think this House needs to consider this issue and give direction to the government so that our reputation does not continue to be injured abroad.

The CEO markets some \$6 billion worth of grain to some 70 countries around the world. It is a major known institution around the world and one that maintains great credibility for Canada and Canadians abroad.

On that basis, I am making the request for an emergency debate.

Government Orders

• (1720)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Malpeque for raising this matter. It is not the first time he has raised it. He raised it at least once last week and, I know, attempted to raise it on a second occasion.

I certainly regard the matter to be of considerable importance and I recognize that the House might feel that an emergency debate on this subject is important. However, I would like some time to reflect on this.

It is one hour before the scheduled hour of adjournment so I will not order it for today under any circumstances. However, I would be prepared to take it under advisement if the House would give its consent to allow me to consider the matter overnight and then I will render a decision tomorrow morning after routine proceedings.

The rules require that I give the ruling later this day but if the House would give its consent, I will defer until tomorrow after routine proceedings.

Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT ACT

The House resumed from December 7 consideration of the motion that Bill C-12, An Act to provide for emergency management and to amend and repeal certain Acts, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate today in the debate on Bill C-12, An Act to provide for emergency management and to amend and repeal certain Acts.

The bill specifically asks for:

“...the appropriation of public revenue under the circumstances, in the manner and for the purposes set out in a measure entitled “*An Act to provide for emergency management and to amend and repeal certain Acts*”.

This enactment provides for a national emergency management system that strengthens Canada’s capacity to protect Canadians.

Canadians want assurances that the impact of emergencies will be minimized, that assistance will be available and disruptive effects will be limited and short-lived. To address these issues, the bill is pursuing the commitments under the national security policy, notably the review of the statutory framework for emergency management activities.

The purpose of this new act is to strengthen the readiness of the Government of Canada to prepare for, mitigate the impact of and respond to all hazards in Canada. It recognizes that emergency management is an evolving risk environment that requires a collective and a concerted approach between all jurisdictions, including the private sector and non-governmental authorities.

In summary, the bill would strengthen our readiness to mitigate the impact of and prevent or prepare for and respond to all hazards. It should be noted that the bill actually replaces the Emergency Preparedness Act of 1988 and is virtually identical to the bill introduced in 2005 by the previous Liberal government, namely Bill C-78. Accordingly, I would like to say at the outset that the Liberal Party will be supporting the bill, but there are some areas of question which we believe would be important for committee to address.

The Liberal Party certainly welcomes the reintroduction of the emergency management bill. The bill builds on our record on security since 9/11: first, an investment of over \$9.5 billion to strengthen national security, to improve emergency preparedness and to contribute to international security; second, the creation of the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness; and third, the establishment of a national 24/7 government operation centre to coordinate federal emergency response.

I would like to give some background here. The bill would strengthen the capability of the government to prepare for, manage, mitigate and respond to all types of emergencies. This will become an interesting question because emergencies mean different things to different people. It would establish clear lines of authority and responsibility in collaboration with the provinces and municipalities. The bill would also facilitate information sharing between government and the private sector and with regard to the protection of critical infrastructure.

The bill replaces, as I stated, the Emergency Preparedness Act of 1988, while preserving its basic provisions in the civil emergency planning and preparedness as a key government responsibility; that delineates responsibilities between the public safety minister and cabinet colleagues; that makes provision for federal-provincial cooperation; and finally, that makes provision for post-disaster financial assistance to provinces. The issue with regard to the provinces is also an important one because of the jurisdictional responsibilities and the need for coordination of course.

The revised act grants new powers to the Minister of Public Safety to exercise national level leadership in emergency management by: first, coordinating federal response to emergencies in Canada and the United States. It is an important element that also includes matters that relate to and may have occurred within the United States but may have an impact on Canada.

Second, it establishes standardized elements for the Government of Canada emergency plans. Third, it monitors and evaluates emergency management plans for federal institutions. Fourth, it enhances cooperation with other jurisdictions through common standards and information sharing. In our experience, harmonizing those common standards will certainly be a tough situation, as it always is.

• (1725)

With regard to the bill more specifically, clause 2 defines emergency management as “the prevention and mitigation of, preparedness for, response to and recovery from emergencies”.

Clause 3 establishes a national leadership role for the Minister of Public Safety in relation to emergency management.

Government Orders

Subclause 4(1) outlines the minister's responsibilities in fulfilling that national leadership role and it includes a broad variety of responsibilities. Paragraphs 4(1)(a), (b) and (c) include coordinating functions in development, testing, implementation and evaluation of government emergency management plans. Paragraphs 4(1)(d) and (e) include monitoring potential and actual emergencies and coordinating of the government response. Paragraphs 4(1)(f), (g), (h) and (i) include coordinating emergency arrangements and responses with the provinces. Paragraph 4(1)(j) includes providing financial assistance to a province if requested. Paragraph 4(1)(l) includes providing the continuity of constitutional government in the event of an emergency.

Clause 6 outlines the general responsibility of each minister, and there are other ministries that are involved outside the Minister of Public Safety, to ensure his or her department prepares emergency management plans and sets out common standards of those plans.

Clause 7 grants the governor in council powers to make orders or regulations with respect to emergency management plans, to use federal resources in response to civil emergencies, to provide financial assistance to provinces and to declare a provincial emergency of concern to the federal government. Certainly that is an area of sensitivity that has to be properly addressed.

Clauses 8 to 10 amend the Access to Information Act to permit the government to refuse to disclose private sector information supplied in confidence to the government with respect to emergency management plans. A public interest override is included.

The bill covers a pretty broad range of responsibilities that I might look at a little later in my comments, but I wanted to touch on some of the areas that have come up already with regard to concern within the bill that we would want to look most carefully at.

The bill would allow the federal government to refocus or better coordinate the organization of its response to emergencies. This is not in contention, but we should note that there is a difference between what is called an emergency and what we might regard as a security related incident.

An emergency may be as a result of a natural disaster, whereas a security related incident might be something along the lines of a terrorist attack, for instance. They are not always the same. Most of what the bill would deal with are emergencies involving natural disasters with some component of man-made contribution in it. Being able to assess whether or not we have adequately covered those situations certainly was a matter of interest and concern.

I am a little concerned personally why it took so long for the government to get the bill to us. As I indicated, it was a bill that was substantively before the House in the last Parliament and here we are some time later, but moving on, in reality, emergencies and natural disasters have evolved and become more complex. We simply need a government minister, aside from the Minister of National Defence who historically would have been the lead minister to take charge in these matters, who would coordinate these things. That would be the federal Minister of Public Safety. That is one thing this bill does that is different from the previous bill.

The second thing we are promoting is the imposition of protection for private information of third parties in the hands of government.

As I indicated, the bill provides for a related amendment to subsection 20(1) of the Access to Information Act by adding an additional paragraph to give effect to these provisions.

• (1730)

There also are five or six subsections of the act which would be affected. Those ostensibly relate to the circumstance where information is provided to the minister by persons who would otherwise be covered under the Access to Information Act and that their information which is given is going to be exempt. In other words, if it is given with regard to a situation where there is an emergency as defined, that information would be kept private.

The other area of the bill in which there is an amendment has to do with Bill C-2 which has just been passed by the House after receiving some important changes. It was the first full bill that was introduced by the government and I can recall that there was a lot of concern about the haste in which Bill C-2 had been drafted. It contains amendments to a wide range of legislative areas. As well, it puts a significant onus on the public service to establish a broad range of management procedures, all in the realm of ensuring that accountability is kept in place.

The other thing it does which is interesting and has come up a few times, is in Bill C-2, there are some amendments to Bill C-11, the whistleblower bill, which received royal assent in the last Parliament. It received the unanimous support of all parties. We now find ourselves with another important bill which ostensibly arose out of the case of George Radwanski, the former privacy commissioner, who for a variety of reasons was put in a situation where he resigned his position and indeed suffered some consequences as a result of his actions which I will not go into.

Bill C-12 contains a coordinating amendment to Bill C-2 that should Bill C-2 have received royal assent, this amendment included in Bill C-12 will be made to that bill.

The bill repeals the Emergency Preparedness Act, chapter 6 of the fourth supplement to the Revised Statutes of Canada, 1985.

The last clause in the bill is the coming into force clause. It is something on which I have commented before as the co-chair of the Standing Joint Committee on Scrutiny of Regulations. We have embarked on a review. In fact at the last meeting we actually were looking at the Fisheries Act and some regulations that were necessary. This item has been outstanding for 23 years. All of the people at the table certainly were not here when it started and I suspect if we do not do something about it, there are going to be new people at the table when it ultimately gets resolved, if ever.

Government Orders

We also had a private member's bill dealing with the repeal of acts which had received royal assent, either entire acts or acts which included amendments to other acts which had received royal assent but had not been proclaimed within 10 years. It has some provisions whereby it could be saved during the last year. That report would be tabled in the House identifying the bills that are coming up to their 10th anniversary and would allow the government of the day to make some decisions as to whether or not it is going to act on triggering those changes.

This bill also includes coming into force. Clause 14 says, "This Act other than section 12 comes into force on a day to be fixed by order of the Governor in Council". What that means is that cabinet is going to decide when the provisions of this particular bill come into play. This is the kind of provision which gives rise to the problem of things lingering for an extensive period of time. I am not entirely sure why there is not a specified date or some sort of horizon period. This is a very important bill. It is a bill that I would have liked to see introduced much earlier. This bill which deals with public protection and safety is very important to Canadians.

● (1735)

There is a proviso in the bill which caught my attention. Under "Minister's responsibilities", subclause 4(2) states:

The Minister has any other responsibilities in relation to emergency management that the Governor in Council may specify.

This may cause some difficulty, although I am not sure and we will have to wait until we can get an opinion on it. The bill is purported to include all of the provisions and responsibilities, but that subclause includes anything else we think we should do. Those things would presumably happen through regulation or governor in council and not be available to the House to consider.

This would appear to give the government of the day a free hand in terms of adding to the bill things which probably should be included in the statutes themselves with regard to better defining this. When there is a blanket responsibility, anything else that the governor in council may specify is basically *carte blanche*.

We have talked often in the scrutiny of regulations committee about whether a particular regulation or change to a bill in fact has an enabling provision in the act. This has a blanket enabling provision, which means that theoretically almost anything could happen through a governor in council order. That is a matter which may very well come up if not here, then certainly in the other place.

There is another item I want to mention with regard to issues which have come up. Subclause 7(c) allows the government to make regulation to declare a provincial emergency to be of concern to the federal government. It appears that the intention of the bill is to put the federal responsibility on what would be a provincial emergency. When people look at this they are going to want to explore it a little further because of the coordinating requirements.

There is another clause in the bill which deals with making regulations, as I indicated, on the issue of whether we have any statutory jurisdiction in the United States of America. Of course, we do not have any statutory jurisdiction. That would involve an extraterritorial application of our laws. However, it does not prevent us from developing an emergency management plan. The point is

that it may involve the spending of money and resources in the United States. That is a matter which gets us very much involved.

Clause 7 of the bill creates the authority to make regulation. It seems to indicate that it anticipates spending money in the United States of America. For example, subclause 7(b) talks about regulations respecting the use of federal civil resources in response to civil emergencies. The question becomes whether that includes assistance in response to United States emergencies. If we respond to an emergency management plan that we have developed with the U.S., are we talking just about the border or are we talking about Laredo or some other area, maybe even Hawaii? There are some interesting questions to which I still do not know whether we have the answers.

I am suggesting there are some technical issues and if it is intended that the minister or governor in council make regulations about joint emergency management plans, that should also be set out in the statute. I am not sure whether that is the case.

● (1740)

All in all, the fundamental elements of the bill appear to be consistent with the bill in the previous Parliament of the Liberal government. The Liberal caucus will be supporting the bill.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have seen consecutive governments struggle to come to terms not only with emergencies that have occurred in Canada, but emergencies that have occurred overseas, especially those affecting Canadians.

Although a protocol was set in place, from time to time we have knee-jerk reactions by governments throughout the years as to how we handle these emergencies. There was the tsunami, the earthquake in Pakistan and, more recent, the crisis in Lebanon.

Could my colleague can share with the House some of his thoughts and ideas, especially on the disaster in Lebanon, on the reaction of the government of the day and how it was botched? What can he see should be enhanced in the bill should a disaster like this happen again, not only for Canadians but loved ones of Canadians, especially people thinking of immigrating to Canada, wives and children of Canadians? Could he share with the House some of his thoughts and ideas on the mismanagement of the Lebanon crisis and what protocols should be in place to ensure we do not go down that road again?

● (1745)

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, we are at third reading of the bill at this point. Unless the House decides to return the bill to committee, we will have to rely on the other place to perhaps considered those questions.

I cannot, with certitude, answer the member's question. It does sound like he is talking about the protection of Canadian citizens abroad. I do not believe that was the intent of the bill. I do not know whether there is a way in which, pragmatically, one could build provisos in a bill which would provide that protection or security the member seeks for Canadians citizens abroad, keeping in mind there are Canadian citizens all around the world. I think it would be beyond the scope of the bill as it presently exists. The member may want to raise it with the other place.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the bill before us is Bill C-12, An Act to provide for emergency management and to amend and repeal certain Acts. Obviously, we have no problem with the basic principle that the federal government can take action to respond to emergencies.

That said, it is extremely important that the federal government understand that the provinces, particularly Quebec, have already prepared emergency response plans. The government should not try to use this bill, which is now at third reading, to encroach on areas of jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces. The summary of the bill reads as follows:

This enactment provides for a national emergency management system that strengthens Canada's capacity to protect Canadians.

In future, we should perhaps take into account the motion adopted in this House to the effect that Quebecers form a nation. When the bill refers to a national system, it is actually referring to a Canada-wide emergency management system.

A number of aspects of the bill could lead to encroachments on Quebec's jurisdictions. As I mentioned, Quebec already has a number of emergency response plans. These plans and the legislation that provides for them were developed in the wake of catastrophes such as the flooding in Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean and the ice storm.

In 2001, Quebec adopted a new Civil Protection Act, which replaced the Act respecting the protection of persons and property in the event of disaster, dating from 1979. I want to point out that this reorganization took place under the direction of the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, who was then the Minister of Public Safety in the National Assembly of Quebec.

Under the law that was adopted in 2001, a national plan was drawn up, a civil protection plan for Quebec. It divides responsibility among government departments and agencies according to their respective jurisdictions and organizes government resources so that the government can respond to various types of disasters.

Obviously, we all understand that to be effective, this plan relies on some relatively simple principles: citizen and corporate accountability; better preparation of regional authorities, such as municipalities and, in Quebec's case, regional county municipalities; better coordination among partners in the sector; and optimal use of the Government of Quebec's resources. Obviously, there would be no problem with the federal government introducing a plan that complements the provinces' plans, as I said. When the ice storm hit, the Government of Quebec called in the Canadian army to help, especially to clean up the road system, which was in terrible shape because of weather conditions.

In that context, the Bloc Québécois recognizes the federal government's right, nay, its obligation, to ensure that its institutions and departments are prepared to deal with emergency situations. The Bloc Québécois also believes, as I said, that the federal government should not interfere with how Quebec and the provinces organize their public emergency services.

I must reiterate the fact that it is, first and foremost, every citizen's responsibility to prepare for potential disasters, even if that means just having a first aid kit at home. Companies are also responsible for

having their own plans for dealing with emergency situations. According to Quebec's plan, the front line responders are the municipalities, regional county municipalities—which support their municipalities—and the Government of Quebec—which supports the regional county municipalities and the municipalities.

Once again, I repeat that not only does this make perfect sense, it is also desirable for the federal government to develop an emergency response plan and corresponding legislation. Let us hope that this does not mean more opportunities to encroach on Quebec's jurisdiction.

• (1750)

We will support this bill on those terms.

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague from the Bloc Québécois. He mentioned that the province of Quebec was ready for a national emergency. How would he react to an emergency that involves Canadians overseas?

I am sure my hon. colleague will agree that it takes the Government of Canada to respond to an emergency overseas where Canadians are in harm's way. It needs to ensure that Canadian diplomats are in place as well as Canadian know-how to get folks home from a place such as Lebanon. Has my colleague any comments on that?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. As I mentioned in my speech, clearly, certain matters come under federal jurisdiction, and he just mentioned one example. In the crisis that arose in Lebanon this summer, it was normal for the federal government to take responsibility for evacuating Canadians.

As I said and I will repeat here, it is customary for the government to have an emergency plan as well as legislation for emergencies. It is important to bear in mind that, within their jurisdictions, the provinces and Quebec already have some plans. We must avoid overlapping and duplications. What we are hoping for is coordination.

Obviously, certain situations can affect more than one jurisdiction, such as a natural disaster or epidemic. Imagine if the SARS outbreak in Ontario had spread to Quebec. Clearly, in this type of situation, the federal government can play a role of coordination, but it must nevertheless respect the jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces.

The hon. member is right. On the international stage, and until Quebec becomes a sovereign state, the federal government is responsible for evacuating Canadians and Quebecers caught in emergency or crisis situations, as in the example of Lebanon I just mentioned.

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and speak to Bill C-12 at third reading.

The Government of Canada has needed this bill for quite some time, in the sense that it allows us finally as a government and our agencies across the country to prepare for a state of emergency. I think mostly we are addressing natural disasters. These are ones that can cause great damage, not only of a monetary amount but also in terms of deaths and injury to our citizenry.

We know from looking across the globe, when other countries have faced those kinds of natural disasters, that it is abundantly clear that if we are ready, prepared, have a plan and coordination in place, have resources in place, both in terms of dollars and personnel that a substantial difference can be made in the outcome, both in terms of the number of lives and the number of injuries we save and, yes, the amount of dollars we save for our communities by reducing the impact of natural disasters.

I do not think we have seen that more clearly in a developed country than what we saw in the United States with hurricane Katrina about a year ago. We had the wealthiest country in the world in terms of economic well-being that was not prepared, did not have the coordination in place, the personnel in place and the resources in place.

As a result, one of the major cities in the U.S. was devastated for an extended period of time. The city had mass evacuations and many more deaths than would have been normal for that type of an incident had the city been prepared and had that coordination been in place.

What Bill C-12 does is to provide us with that infrastructure. Parts of the bill are already there. A good deal of it is already there, but it is not in a coordinated fashion.

The people who do this work, who came before us and have testified, both from the federal government and from other areas, both the non-profit area and some of the other institutions that are most keenly affected by this, the utility companies for instance, all made very clear their desire to work in a coordinated fashion, to get all of the structure in place.

We need a structure should we be faced again with a flood in your home province of Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, or with an ice storm that we had here in Ontario, or with the loss of power that we had along the whole eastern seaboard only a couple of years ago that also affected Ontario. We can go down the list and we know that we have not always responded to the very best way.

Hopefully, this structure that we are building by way of this legislation will in fact allow us to respond to our absolute maximum. The NDP is going to support this legislation. It is badly needed legislation, as I have already said. The one trepidation I have in supporting the bill is that we have not dealt fairly with the local level of government and with the NGOs, the non-profit sector and the volunteer sector.

There is passing mention of them in the legislation. The crucial part we know. We can say this because we heard some of this evidence in committee. In March I was at an international conference

that was hosted here in Canada. We had people from Pakistan who recently dealt with an earthquake about this time last year. We had representatives from a number of the countries that had been devastated by the tsunami in Asia.

Every single country, without exception, whether they were an undeveloped and poor country or a first world developed country, said the same thing. They said that the key to minimizing the impact, other than the coordination and the planning in advance, was the ability of the local community to respond in the first few hours, the first 24 to 48 hours.

• (1755)

Generally speaking, regional governments, in our case, the provinces, or national governments, our government, are not able to get their people in fast enough, their equipment in fast enough, or their resources in fast enough to respond immediately. That happens at the local level. We talked in terms of first responders and that, with very few exceptions, is the local level of government, the municipal level of government.

Certainly, the Red Cross and agencies like that are also there, oftentimes again, within the first few hours. They provide the initial immediate relief. They are the ones who save lives. They are the ones who prevent further injury and minimize injuries. They provide food and clothing immediately and shelter, oftentimes immediately.

The legislation has a failing in this regard in that it does not adequately reflect that key essential role that the local level of government provides and I want to take this opportunity acknowledge that.

The official opposition and I made various attempts to amend the legislation in committee during clause by clause study to try and get that acknowledgement in, buttress the role that local governments play by way of officially acknowledging them in the legislation. However, between the Conservatives and the Bloc Québécois, they would not support those amendments and they did not pass.

The end result is that although we have had extensive consultation with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the Red Cross and some of the other agencies, the legislation is not fair to them. I make these comments recognizing all of the very fine work that they have done and that I am sure they will continue to do.

There are some additional things that the federal government could do in terms of bringing them in early to the consultation process and having them on some of the planning and coordinating committees that will be established. Some are already under this legislation and they play a key role when we actually are faced with this kind of a disaster.

We will be supporting the legislation with those reservations. It is important that we get started on this. That planning and coordination, putting in place the resources, will further protect our citizenry. No government has any greater responsibility than to protect its citizenry from this type of public danger. The sooner the legislation gets through and we begin to deploy it, the better off the country will be as a whole.

Government Orders

• (1800)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I heard my hon. colleague from the NDP speak very passionately about the role that the NGOs play. Having been to some of the places that he mentioned, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Indonesia, and seen firsthand the work that the local NGOs play and certainly how they are able to deliver for the first 24, 48, or 72 hours a need, his comments are appreciated. However, I am going to ask my colleague to go one more step.

Canada, being such a diverse country, has many citizens from many different places and many of them do travel. Does the hon. member not feel that we could extend this legislation one step further so that it also includes the response from this government should Canadians end up in a situation, such as a tsunami or an earthquake in Pakistan or an earthquake in Gujarat, India, or even what happened in Lebanon with 50,000 Canadians. Does he not feel that we need to have in place tested means so that we are able to evacuate our citizens and provide for them firsthand to ensure that they are returned to Canada safely?

We have citizens all over the world. In my constituency of Scarborough—Agincourt, I have close to 27,000 Chinese. Many of them have dual citizenship and many of them have family in Hong Kong, and some of them travel to Hong Kong. Should a disaster happen in that part of the world, should a disaster happen in any other part of the world, this legislation does not go far enough to address that issue.

I am just wondering if my colleague and my good friend across the way could summarize his own thoughts in his own words and certainly expand on what happened in Lebanon and the knee-jerk reaction of the Conservative government which botched it up. How can we ensure that this does not reoccur again?

• (1805)

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, like the member, I had the opportunity to be in Sri Lanka and I have seen the devastation that it caused to that particular country and how important it was for the NGOs and for the immediate response we had from the military.

To pick up on the member's point about us being prepared to evacuate people, it is not just in wartime that we are faced with that. We are faced with it right across Asia with the impacts of tsunamis. Those are not nearly the numbers that we are faced with in Lebanon but still substantial numbers. We must be able to provide assistance and get our citizens and residents out of the area.

I do not want to downplay the importance of how poorly I saw the Lebanese war situation handled, having a very large population in my riding and in my community. I agree with the member's assessment that it was handled very poorly. We were clearly not prepared. In that regard I draw to the member's attention paragraph 4 (1)(k) in the bill whereby the minister's responsibilities include:

(k) participating, in accordance with Canada's foreign relations policies, in international emergency management activities;

Therefore, there is an actual direct mandate. It is not as broad as I thought it should be, but quite frankly this legislation clearly was designed to deal with the domestic public disasters, particularly in other emergencies. I should not say public disasters because of

course one of the issues could be, for instance, a melt down in one of our nuclear reactors, or an attack on one of them, or on some of our other public utilities. It may not just be a public disaster. It could be an act of terrorism as well.

The proposed legislation is really not designed, as I see it, other than in a very general way, to equip us as a country to deal with international public disasters or incidents that would call for that kind of expertise. Hopefully, as we build that expertise more extensively in this country, it will also teach us how we should be responding in other countries.

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to set the record straight. Despite all the lessons in history from World War I, World War II and the tsunami, the member for Scarborough—Agincourt was actually in the government during some of those disasters before Lebanon and frankly did absolutely nothing.

Hon. John Baird: The Liberals weren't responsible for anything bad.

Mr. Gary Goodyear: I am told they were not responsible, but the fact is that previous government had all kinds of opportunities and did nothing. The member for Scarborough—Agincourt should be ashamed.

I am going to ask the member a question. Frankly, the evacuation in Lebanon was a success. It was an absolute and complete success. I would like the hon. member to comment on the fact that public servants, who the member for Scarborough—Agincourt completely insults, most of whom were not paid, worked 24 hours a day, evacuated 13,000 people in a matter of days, despite the fact the previous government had no emergency management plan.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague from the NDP to recognize the fact that this evacuation mission was incredibly difficult and how successful it was especially dealing with the fact that we had to deal with a number of terrorist organizations in the attempt to get our people out of Lebanon at that very crucial and dangerous time. We had 240 Canadians on the ground going door to door, not just emails, while that member sat on his duff. I wonder if I could get a comment from my hon. colleague on that success.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, in echoing the preparedness needed in the planning, coordination and all of that, I cannot lay too much blame at the feet of the present government. That kind of work has to be done well advance.

As much as I am critical of what happened in Lebanon, I want to be very clear that the staff there showed exemplary courage. A number of them moved into the area, right in the midst of that war, in particular in Beirut, which was being bombed on a regular basis all over the city. They took their lives in their hands and moved in. I do not think we can ever say enough to acknowledge the courage they demonstrated. A very large number of additional staff was moved in, fully recognizing that.

Government Orders

The major concern I come back to, because of the experience I had in the first 24, 48, 72 hours, was the contact in Ottawa. I will take some credit. I made some suggestions that ultimately were followed through. However, when I initially made the suggestions, at the other end of the telephone line was blank air. I got a very quiet they had not thought of that type of attitude and/or they would take it under advisement, but it was really not that important. The sense I had, and still to this day, was that the people on the streets, on the front lines in Beirut and Lebanon, knew what was going on, but the senior people here had not taken into account just how serious the situation was until we were 48, 72 hours into the process. Then the planning began.

Again, it comes back to the legislation. Although it does not deal with it enough, the planning has to be in place at the national level so when the incident happens, we begin to kick in right away. That is what happens at the municipal level now. It does not happen at either the provincial or the federal level, and that is what we hope the legislation will see happen. Maybe we will also be ready for the next international incident as well, to deal with both our citizens and those of other countries.

• (1810)

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, has the member given any thought, or the House, given any thought as to how we define a disaster or an emergency? We have been asking the House for the last week to declare a state of emergency where homelessness and poverty are concerned.

I have been travelling the country for the last couple of months, looking at some of our major cities where we would not expect there to be an emergency. We see hundreds of people on the streets, not enough housing and not enough shelters. Now communities are passing laws to make it illegal to be homeless in some of those cities.

At what point and how do we finally, as a society and a government, decide that an emergency is an emergency?

Mr. Joe Comartin: That is a very good question, Mr. Speaker. When we look at how emergencies are defined, they are defined by repeating the word "emergency". It appears in the first few sections under interpretation.

The legislation does not address what an emergency is. I agree with my colleague, the member for Sault Ste. Marie, about the tragedy we are faced with, particularly in cities such as Vancouver and Calgary where we have unusually cold climates this early on in the year. There should be a very clear category of when we use these services, and that is not clear in the legislation. We see the results of that when we look at what is happening on our streets in all our major cities across the country.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to speak to the bill. I want to articulate a challenge we have in the future in terms of emergency management within our country.

When we were in government, we implemented a number of suggestions that would go a long way, but we also have a number of challenges that still need to be addressed by the government.

One thing we did was pre-deployed a number of hospitals, which we used internationally. These hospitals are made up of about 200

beds each and they can be deployed on quick notice for emergencies and urgencies within our country.

The other thing we did was set up a spot in Ottawa that was open 24/7. Its job is to act as a central brain to coordinate the internal management of emergencies within our country. We have coordinated that centre in Ottawa to other areas of the country. Each province has its own management centre, which is tied to areas on the ground.

It is important for the public to know what happens in the case of an emergency.

Our first responders are our police officers and firefighters, who do an outstanding job. If there are emergencies in our communities, they respond first.

The second responders are our Canadian Forces. If an emergency is too large for either of those groups to deal with it properly, then we call in other assets from around the country. That is the internal coordinating mechanism we put forward. However, there are some challenges that need to be worked out and these are some of the things I hope the government will pursue. One is the issue of communications.

What we have seen in the case of hurricane Katrina and other instances, is when there is an emergency, particularly a big one, the civilians, who are victims, are the emergency workers as well. The first thing emergency workers will do is take care of their families, which speaks to the problem of communication.

When there is an emergency or an urgency, one of the first things to go south is the communication network. It falls apart. What we have tried to fast track is an internal communication network across our country that is independent of the existing communication networks. It is absolutely imperative that the government continues the work we did and fast track the need for a domestic, emergency communication network that can be deployed by our first and second responders in the case of an emergency.

I cannot overemphasize the need for this. We learned from Katrina and our Canadian Forces, in their incredible response to the situation in Louisiana. We found that the American response to Katrina was wanting. It was instructive not only for the Americans, but also for us to assess that situation and learn some lesson from it, and we did.

Having learned those lessons and identified those problems, it is important that we act upon them. I want to emphasize the absolute need for the government to invest in and implement, as soon as possible, an emergency coordinating communication network that will not fall apart in the case of an emergency.

I know in my province of British Columbia there is a great worry, naturally, about a tsunami or an earthquake. We know that some time within the next 100 years we will have a massive earthquake as the two plates on the west coast collide and grind against each other, which will cause a lot of problems. Therefore, we need to do a better job of coordinating those mechanisms.

Government Orders

The other thing the government ought to do is engage and upgrade the training for our firefighters, our police officers and our military in the area of HAZMAT, hazardous materials. Hazardous materials require a certain specific area of capabilities and equipment. It is very important for the government to make investments in the equipment and training that we started with respect to our firefighters, our police officers and our Canadian Forces.

• (1815)

One of the things the government could do that would be quite intelligent would be to utilize our reserves. When I was the parliamentary secretary to the minister of national defence, one thing I was working on was the possibility of utilizing our reserves as part of a second responder team. They would receive the training and equipment that would enable to come together in the communities and be the second responders in the case of an emergency that overwhelmed our police and firefighters.

It is also very important for the government, and our government had started this process, to look not only at the lessons learned from hurricane Katrina, but also at the lessons learned from the 9/11 report. The 9/11 report was very good at laying bare the challenges faced by the authorities in the United States in responding to the terrorist attack in New York. Analyzing and dissecting the 9/11 report would enable our authorities to take a good look at what would be required by government officials in implementing the urgent responses required.

On an international scale, I want to put in this plug right now for the minister responsible for CIDA. There is one problem that I have seen internationally, and it is that whenever there is a massive international emergency, we always start from square zero, so to speak. That is not necessary. CIDA ought to be working through the World Health Organization to establish an integrated mechanism of first responders. We would then have on a computer a listing of heavy lift equipment, emergency medical and military personnel, engineers and others, along with the assets, the perishable foods, tents for shelter, water, and water purification systems, everything that would be needed for a massive emergency. All of it should be established in a database.

Then, if there were an emergency on the west coast of British Columbia, for example, or an emergency in Asia Minor again, where there are always tragedies because of its location in an earthquake zone, rather than starting from square one and trying to identify all these assets, rather than trying to compile them from square zero, so to speak, we would be able to work and lead with the World Health Organization and our health action crisis group and Dr. Alwan.

We could establish an emergency response in which, with the click of a finger on a computer, we could identify those assets. That is the model we use in emergency medicine. There is absolutely no reason why we cannot take that micro-model and translate it into the international sphere. No one has done this before. Whether we are working in an emergency department where we have what is called the golden hour or in this, we know that same narrow window of time applies to international emergencies.

Canada could lead on something like this. If we worked with multilateral organizations and implemented the mechanism that I have suggested, we would be able to save a lot of lives. No one has

done this before. It is a niche that our country can champion. It is a niche that we can adopt. It is one that we could use by tapping into the best and brightest minds in our country and others. Essentially, we could develop a coalition of the willing. It would be a true coalition of the willing, an emergency response group specifically developed to deal with emergency situations around the world.

A failure to do this would be unconscionable. We have seen time and time again that dealing with emergency situations in slow motion causes increased levels of mortality and morbidity. If a person is stuck in that kind of emergency situation, the fact is that the person's life can be saved or the illness or injury avoided. It is simply not right for someone to die in an emergency situation when we can do otherwise. I am suggesting to the government that we as a country, we as a Parliament, champion these solutions, which will go a long way to saving many lives.

• (1820)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I cannot help but take exception to some of the comments that were made by the member for Cambridge. He questioned my integrity. He questioned where I was after the tsunami and where I was after the Pakistan earthquake.

In order to set the record straight, I was there, on both accounts, and certainly there after what happened in Lebanon. We do not need to take this lesson from the Conservatives. They botched that up by the numbers. The minister certainly had deaf ears. I remember calling into Lebanon, and absolutely nobody answered the phones in the Canadian embassy, and yet people were answering the phones in the American embassy.

In his estimate, how does my colleague from Victoria see the reaction, over the summertime, by the Canadian government in response to the crisis in Lebanon? Was it a complete botch-up? Or was it worth this House taking notice of?

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, I know the personnel at the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Privy Council Office and CIDA worked exceptionally hard. People pulled 18 hour days and had very little sleep. We want to compliment the bureaucrats who often do not get any thanks but who in this case deserve enormous praise for the hard work they did.

What my colleague is referring to are the actions by the Minister of Foreign Affairs which were late. The elected officials in the government, unfortunately, let the department down in not exerting and exercising the leadership it should have had in the situation. I hope it learned a lesson.

My colleague worked very hard to try to convince the government to act with speed on this. While officials in foreign affairs and CIDA were doing their very best, there was an absence of leadership at the top. We hope the government has learned its lesson from this and that it will be able to implement some of the solutions it has heard here.

I implore the government to implement these solutions that I mentioned in my speech. They could save a lot of lives and it would be a niche area of capability that our country and the government could champion. At the end of the day we will save a lot of lives. I know we can do that with leadership.

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1825)

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.
(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Even though we will only save about three minutes, if you seek it I think you would find unanimous consent to see the clock as 6:30 p.m.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to see the clock as 6:30 p.m.?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on October 18, I asked the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development a question regarding the march by workers and the unemployed, from Montreal to Ottawa, to ask the government for changes to employment insurance. We know that of those who pay into the plan, only 38% of men and 32% of women are eligible for employment insurance.

The government response is that 85% qualify. These are individuals who would normally qualify, but not individuals who really pay into the plan.

I will quote the minister:

As he knows, employment insurance is extremely broad, extremely complex. Any changes that are to be made, we have to make sure that they do not affect some other part of EI in an adverse way. That is why we are slowly going through and making sure we pay due attention to all the various aspects of EI so that it meets the needs of all Canadians.

That is the government's response. The Conservatives might say they are a new government, but while the Liberals were in power for 13 years, the Conservative Party—or the Reform Party or the Canadian Alliance Party—was in opposition for 13 years and it knows full well the harm this causes to seasonal workers.

The minister's response, as I was saying, is “cut and paste” in computer terms. It is the same thing. The minister's response is the same response the Liberals kept giving since 1996. It is exactly the same response that officials have written for the minister for the past 13 years, or since 1996. The minister comes back and says this needs to be studied. In the meantime, people are suffering, people are not qualifying for employment insurance.

What is more, there was a second question to do with older workers. This was the minister's response:

I would like to quote the president of the CPQ who said yesterday about our new program: Between being given a fish and learning to fish, the choice is clear. We have to help the affected workers retrain in different areas, and the sooner the better.

I think the minister does not understand what it takes to catch a fish. Back home they knew how to catch fish and now there are no fish left in the sea. They learned to catch fish, but now there are no fish left, which is why there are problems in the regions where there is seasonal work, in Atlantic Canada and in Quebec.

The issue of older workers applies as much to people working in the fishery as to people working in the textile industry. The government says it has no intention of abandoning older workers and that it plans to help them. The Conservative government has abandoned the workers. A new government had the opportunity to make changes to employment insurance.

Earlier, when people from Quebec marched from Montreal to Ottawa, they were only told that the government would slowly look into it. For the 13 years the Liberals were in power they had time to look into it. They were in parliamentary committee and they made recommendations to change employment insurance.

I would like to hear what the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development has to say about these questions and to the people from Quebec who marched from Montreal all the way here to Ottawa.

• (1830)

[*English*]

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I pleased to respond to the contention of the member for Acadie—Bathurst that access to employment insurance is severely restricted.

Access is an issue the Government of Canada closely monitors through the EI Commission's annual monitoring and assessment report. However, unlike what the member opposite would contend, successive reports have clearly shown that EI is meeting its objectives. For example, the 2005 report demonstrated that EI was sufficiently assisting Canadians experiencing temporary unemployment in terms of both the amount and duration of benefits. Indeed, over 80% of unemployed Canadians who pay into the program and had recent qualified job separation were eligible for benefits.

The story is similar when looking at EI special benefits with 90% of employees qualifying should they be unable to work for reasons of sickness, childbirth, parenting or because they are providing care to a gravely ill family member.

I should note that the member opposite when raising the topic of EI will often reference a figure known as the beneficiary to unemployment ratio or B/U ratio to suggest between 62% to 68% of Canadians are denied EI benefits. This is a flawed measure, presenting a distorted picture of access to EI.

Adjournment Proceedings

First, it includes those unemployed individuals who have not paid premiums like the self-employed and those who have never worked or who have not worked in the past year.

Second, this measure includes those who paid premiums but are ineligible for EI because they voluntarily quit their job or were unemployed for less than two weeks.

As I indicated earlier, if we look at those for which the program is actually designed, people who have lost a job through no fault of their own, perhaps due to restructuring or a shortage of work, access is very high at over 80%. Moreover, evidence also indicates that access is at least as high in areas of relatively high unemployment as it is in other areas.

If we were, as the member opposite has suggested, to significantly reduce entrance requirements, this would have a marginal impact on the number of additional people qualifying for benefits and would disproportionately benefit those living in regions with low unemployment rates. Moreover, reducing entrance requirements may create disincentives to work as research has shown a significant number of individuals may choose not to work beyond the minimum entrance requirements.

Nevertheless, to reflect differences in unemployment rates across regions, the EI program uses a variable entrance requirement for eligibility, adjusted monthly in each region based on the latest unemployment statistics. Accordingly, when a region's unemployment rate rises, the entrance requirement lowers and the benefit duration increases, allowing for an extended job search period. This measure helps provide consistently high program access. For example, as a result of the variable entrance requirement, individuals with the equivalent of 12 weeks work in a high unemployment zone can access between 31 and 37 weeks of benefits.

Therefore, I would like to again suggest that the member needs to understand the framework of employment insurance and why it has been set up as it is.

• (1835)

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, the truth is that in 1986, when the Conservatives were in power, the Auditor General said that they should take the money from the employment insurance and put it in the general fund. What happened is that the Government of Canada wanted the employment insurance. It depended on the employment insurance. If we look at just this year, the government took the \$2 billion surplus in EI and put it on the debt. It balanced the budget on the backs of working people who lost their job.

We did a study last year on the employment insurance program. The Conservatives were in opposition at the time and the Liberals were in government. Government officials are on the public record saying that of the people paying into EI and the people qualifying for EI, only 32% of women qualified and 38% of men qualified.

The minister said that 80% of the people who qualify for EI receive it, but she is not talking about the people who pay into it but never get the 910 hours to qualify or the 840 hours in the pilot project to qualify. That is what the minister is not talking about.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Speaker, being that the member talks about Conservatives, I would like to talk about the NDP. Unlike the

NDP, Canada's new government believes the best solution to unemployment is economic growth.

It is not just our government that rejects the tired ideas of the NDP. The *Moncton Times & Transcript* called the member for Acadie—Bathurst's proposed EI expansion “misguided and ill-conceived”, saying that it would actually encourage people not to work rather than encourage them to work. At a time of low unemployment and labour shortages across Canada, the suggested course of action from the member opposite would be clearly unsound.

Nonetheless, our new government has made changes to EI to ensure its effectiveness, like expanding the compassionate care benefit eligibility criteria and introducing the extended EI benefits pilot project.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as an immigrant who has worked hard to make a contribution to Canada, I am extremely disappointed with the state of our immigration system. It is failing our country.

Thirteen years of Liberal neglect have been followed by nine months of Conservative neglect. As a result, families are torn apart while they wait many years to be reunited. Well-qualified professionals are not able to work in their professions. The skilled labourers we need cannot get enough points to immigrate. Refugees and people under appeal are vulnerable to federally appointed officials who may abuse their positions and tragically, hard-working, taxpaying people live in fear of deportation.

Thousands of hard-working undocumented workers live in my riding in Toronto and tens of thousands more live across this country. Many were encouraged to stay over the years by the countless Liberal promises to regularize their status, but the Liberals turned a blind eye to undocumented workers. They never changed the law to help give some protection to these workers and their families, including children born and raised in Canada.

A former Liberal immigration minister running for the Liberal leadership gave a stirring speech at the convention in Montreal a couple of Fridays ago, yet he neglected the immigration system. He was guilty of letting it slide. He was guilty of promising new programs to regularize undocumented workers. He was guilty of breaking promises and failing to deliver. He left a lot of these people in limbo.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Conservative government and its Minister of Citizenship and Immigration have been in place for nine months and the minister is following the same pattern as the Liberals. He says no regularization, just deportation of undocumented workers, but he knows that 200,000 people and families are undocumented. He knows that they are essential to many sectors, particularly the construction trade. He cannot possibly contemplate deporting every one of them. He knows the scope of this problem. He knows that with the threat of deportation, people are going underground. He knows it is a threat to their health and a threat to the health of their families, of their children. Some of them might be kept away from school for fear of discovery. He knows that people are vulnerable and may be exploited by employers, neighbours and even government officials.

He knows all that, yet he has not done anything. He has had nine months, yet there has been no attempt to deal with this issue. It is just like the Liberals.

The current programs are not working. The announcement last Friday in Ontario to improve the foreign workers program will not work. Why? Because none of the jobs that the undocumented workers are doing now are listed as an occupation that qualifies for the foreign workers program so it is not going to work. They do not work because too many workers are being refused, even with a job offer the skilled workers category does not work as it does not recognize the skills of the workers and does not give them the points they need.

The government should agree to waive the six month penalty for working illegally and instruct officers to issue work permits. Otherwise the situation will continue to get worse.

Every Canadian should be disappointed by the government's inaction and its callous approach. Every Canadian should be outraged by the harm that has been done to our immigration system. We—

• (1840)

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina, but the four minutes have expired.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is somewhat surprising to hear the member for Trinity—Spadina's views on this issue.

What would Canadian workers say about her party's decision to abandon them and instead reward those who have been working in Canada illegally, especially when they see it draw another wave of illegal workers here? What would immigrant communities who have shown respect for the rule of law by coming here legally say about the NDP's plans for an immigration system that diverts resources away from processing the settlement and integration of legitimate immigrants in favour of those who have ignored our laws? Why is the member for Trinity—Spadina abandoning Canadian workers and those who follow the rules?

Where is the member when it comes to children and families waiting in the immigration queue? Where is she when it comes to reversing the declining outcomes of newcomers to Canada over the

past decade? Where does she stand on funding for services for immigrant and refugee literacy, language training and skills development?

Where does she stand on providing provinces and communities the resources they need to retain the immigrants they work so hard to attract? Where is she when it comes to helping settlement and adaptation agencies build their capacity to deliver services that help immigrants and refugees get off to the right start in Canada as they pursue the Canadian dream?

That member voted against every one of those measures that Canada's new government introduced to improve the lives of immigrants, refugees and new Canadians. She voted against \$307 million and an increase in funds to go to immigrant literacy, language and skills training. She voted against these funds which help newcomers with routine things that ordinary Canadians take for granted, like assisting newcomers with making doctor's appointments or finding schools for their children.

Her decision to vote against funding that would benefit those who arrive in Canada through Canada's immigration system is puzzling to say the least. Canadians must wonder what is going through the minds of the member and her NDP colleagues. Why is she and her party opting to pursue narrow ideology theory over improving the lives of real people?

It seems the member is literally working the opposite side of the street of the member for Davenport who has been using this issue to pander for votes rather than offering any meaningful suggestions of how to reform Canada's immigration system, to encourage legitimate immigration and support newcomers.

What distinguishes these two members from neighbouring ridings is that both opposed the increase in funding for immigrants in budget 2006. Both appear to be ready to abandon fairness and respect for the rule of law that Canadians and immigrants who come here hold dear. Both seem bent on putting their parties' electoral fortunes ahead of the broader public good of improving Canada's immigration system.

Torontonians, like all Canadians, want an immigration system that works. Canada's new government shares their views. With or without the Liberals and the NDP, we passed a budget that increased the funding for immigrants by \$307 million. We increased immigration targets to their highest level in 15 years. We are working with the province of Ontario on improving temporary worker programs, looking for ways to give people who take part in these legitimate programs a chance to call Canada home.

In short, we are working to give Canadians an immigration system that works for all of Canada.

• (1845)

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, the government seems set on following the sorry lead of the Liberals. It seems set on leaving people in limbo and in an unprotected status, leaving children vulnerable and driving immigrants underground. It seems set on ignoring their plight, allowing them to continue to live in fear, being exploited and living in a state of uncertainty.

Adjournment Proceedings

The needs of up to 200,000 people, fellow workers, neighbours, classmates, taxpayers, are being ignored. I want to remind the member that the needs of some of the children born in Canada are also being ignored. These are people who want nothing more than to live in peace in Canada and make a positive contribution to this country. They are already paying taxes.

What kind of cynical approach is the government taking? Canadians expect and deserve better.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, let me be quite clear on this. As I mentioned in my speech, it appears that the member seems to be supporting illegal workers as opposed to those who legitimately come to Canada through the immigration process. It appears that she votes against all of the initiatives, including \$307 million in new funding, for immigrants and the immigration system and instead, rather favours those people who have entered this country illegally. It

seems that the NDP has nothing to do except oppose initiatives that the government has brought forward in the House, such as protection for victims of human trafficking that the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration introduced.

Why would NDP members oppose the very things they profess in their ideology to protect, to love and to cherish? It makes no sense to me and I would guarantee it makes no sense to the average Canadian.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:48 p.m.)

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