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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, December 13, 2006

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, December 13, 2006

The House met at 2 p.m.

• (1405)

Prayers

• (1400)

[English]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia.

[Members sang the national anthem]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

CHRISTMAS WISH LETTER

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with 12 days until Christmas, the little elves from northern Alberta have compiled a wish letter for their oh so nice, brand new Santa. It goes as follows:

“Dear Saint Stelmach:

“We have worked ever so hard over the past year, so please be jolly and not kingly and send us the following soon:

“On the first day of Christmas of this year, more land for houses; on the second day, two new recreation centres; on the third day, three new water treatment plants; on the fourth day, four new senior residences; on the fifth day, five new public schools; on the sixth day, 20 new doctors; on the seventh day, 25 new police officers; on the eighth day, 3,000 new homes; on the ninth day, new roads and bridges; and, on the tenth day of this year, a bigger airport.

“By the 11th day of 2010, we will need 18,000 new homes, and by the 12th day of 2010, we will need 100,000 new workers.

“Santa, if we are brought all these things, then northern Alberta will be equal and as happy as the rest of Canada.

“Thank you and Merry Christmas”.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as members know, December 10 was International Human Rights Day. The Prime Minister issued a statement to mark the occasion in which he is quoted as saying:

Canada...will continue to stand up for human rights and take principled positions on important issues to ensure that freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law—values that define our country—are enjoyed around the world.

Canada is not standing up for the human rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada when it votes against the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Canada has human rights to stand up for within our own borders, as well as around the world.

* * *

[Translation]

REPENTIGNY

Mr. Raymond Gravel (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to thank voters in the riding of Repentigny for placing their trust in me during the election on November 27. I am also grateful to the team of volunteers who did such a good job of guiding and reassuring me during my first election campaign.

I would also like to thank all of my Bloc Québécois colleagues who, despite their busy schedules, found time to support me in the riding.

I am very proud to be part of the Bloc Québécois team and I would like my colleagues to know that I support them. My door is always open.

Above all, I would not want to forget my bishop, the bishop of Joliette, who made it possible for me to experience life in politics. A very special thank you to Msgr. Gilles Lussier.

In closing, I would like to tell my constituents what I used to tell everyone during the election campaign: You are a great bunch of people.

Statements by Members

[English]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, women in Canada are concentrated in low wage and part time jobs. They make only 71¢ for every dollar men make.

Women make up only 20.8% of this House of Commons and, shamefully, one in five Canadian women live in poverty.

On Sunday, in every province and every territory across the country, women told the Conservative government that enough was enough. Women are not happy with the government's slash and burn tactics on the mandate and funding for Status of Women. Women are not happy with the last 13 years of broken promises from the Liberals. The so-called Liberal pink book is a testament to what the Liberals never did.

Women in this country deserve equality, child care, affordable housing and they deserve equal pay. Both the Conservatives and the Liberals have refused to address these issues, leaving women still fighting for equality in 2006.

The entire NDP caucus stands behind the call to reverse policy decisions made by the Conservative government that effectively work against women's rights.

Women in this—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Nanaimo—Alberni.

* * *

BIOSPHERE RESERVES

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is home to 13 UNESCO designated biosphere reserves. Whether it is the Niagara Escarpment in Ontario, Mont Saint-Hilaire in Quebec, Riding Mountain in Manitoba, Clayoquot Sound or Mount Arrowsmith biosphere reserve in my own riding of Nanaimo—Alberni, these areas have some of our most treasured, ecologically diverse assets.

The Canadian Biosphere Reserves Association has done an excellent job of bringing the reserve volunteers together to share expertise and to develop models of sustainable human activity in and around sensitive and valued ecosystems.

The excellent work done by Canadian volunteers has been recognized around the world. However, many of the volunteers are at risk of burning out. It is time for the government to provide a measure of support.

This week I introduced Motion No. 263, a motion that calls on our government to provide a base level of funding for each reserve, to establish an office, to hire an officer to coordinate the efforts of volunteers and to promote the objectives of the biosphere reserve.

Motion No. 263 is intended to capitalize on a Canadian success story and to help our hard-working volunteers to provide public information and to increase appreciation of our most ecologically treasured assets.

GENOCIDE CONVENTION

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is shocking almost beyond words that we face two genocidal threats in our day.

The first is Ahmadinejad's Iran, which denies the Nazi Holocaust as it incites to a new one in its public call for the annihilation of Israel.

The second is the accelerated genocide in Darfur, where over 400,000 have died, where four million are on a desperate life support system and where mass atrocity, rape, the bombing and burning of villages and forced expulsion are regular rituals.

Words and resolutions are important, but what is so necessary now is action and the political will to enforce the genocide convention and the responsibility to protect obligation. Canada, in concert with the international community, must act and act now.

* * *

● (1410)

[Translation]

CITY OF SUDBURY

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, I am pleased to congratulate the new mayor of the City of Greater Sudbury, John Rodriguez, on having raised the Franco-Ontarian flag at city hall when he took office on December 1. I lived in Sudbury for 14 years.

This is a very important symbolic gesture for the Franco-Ontarian community. This gesture of openness shows that the City of Greater Sudbury's new municipal administration intends to build a positive relationship with its francophone community.

The City deserves to be congratulated on this proactive measure recognizing the French-speaking community of Greater Sudbury. This is a proud moment for all Ontario francophones.

* * *

ABDEL KADER BÉLAOUNI

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Abdel Kader Bélaoui is an Algerian citizen who, since January 2006, has been living in the basement of St. Gabriel church in Pointe-Sainte-Charles, where he took refuge. The Government of Canada remains unmoved by his plight and has continued to threaten him with deportation since his refugee claim was denied.

To send him back to his country of origin, where he has not lived for 10 years, is unacceptable, because he has found a helping community here. Today, with the support of the community I represent, I am asking that his situation be regularized and that he be allowed to leave his sanctuary and contribute fully to our society.

The officials of the church that is sheltering him saw fit to give him sanctuary because they believe that there are valid humanitarian reasons for keeping Mr. Bélaoui in Canada and that he can become a citizen and contribute to his host community. This government, on the other hand, has just one goal: to send Mr. Bélaoui back to his country.

Statements by Members

I invite the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to regularize Abdel Kader Bélaoui's situation on compassionate grounds.

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MARATHON OF HOPE

Mr. Christian Paradis (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the 16th Marathon of Hope took place on Saturday, December 9, at the Polyvalente La Samarre in Plessisville, a vibrant city in my riding, Mégantic—L'Érable.

The general manager of the Plessisville Coop store, Suzanne Corriveau, acted as honorary chair of the event. As you know, the Marathon of Hope is becoming the annual event in Plessisville where we celebrate the family values we hold dear.

The marathon raised more than \$88,000, \$28,000 more than the initial target and a record for our region. This is proof that the entire population of the region of L'Érable took part in this major event. The money raised will go to the Oeuvre du partage, an organization that helps people who are in need because of temporary financial problems, job loss or illness.

As the member for Mégantic—L'Érable, I am proud of how the entire population gave generously to the Marathon of Hope.

I believe in and I take part in the Marathon of Hope.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this Conservative government is trying desperately to rip apart the just society that Canadians have been creating for themselves over the past few decades.

Because the government is bound by an ideological straitjacket, it is doing everything all wrong. The global warming file is a striking example. The government reneged on the commitment made by Canada by renouncing the Kyoto protocol.

The Minister of the Environment continues to contradict herself. One day she says no to the purchase of greenhouse gas emissions credits, the next day she says yes, only to turn around and say no again the day after that. One day, she asserts that Canada paid its full contribution to the fight against global warming, then is contradicted by one of her senior officials. She then stubbornly persists, only to be immediately contradicted by official UN documents posted on the Internet.

Meanwhile, the international community is losing faith in the commitment of Canadians, which is not what Canadians want.

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[English]

BIRTHDAY CONGRATULATIONS

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, December 19 marks the 90th birthday of a great Canadian whose contributions to the arts, Canadian military history and Canadian diplomacy will long be remembered by future generations.

Hamilton Southam was the founder and first director general of the National Arts Centre. Built in Canada's centennial year, Mr. Southam was on hand to witness its glittering opening night in 1969.

Mr. Southam is also a World War II veteran, serving in both the British Canadian Army and the Canadian Army. It was his determination that helped in the creation of a memorial honouring 14 valiant men and women.

Mr. Southam, as president of the Valiants Foundation, sought to recognize the contribution of our wartime heroes who gave outstanding wartime service to Canada during the last four centuries.

Unveiled in November of this year, the Valiants Memorial is another example of this remarkable man's contribution to Canadian military history.

A true renaissance man, we salute Mr. Southam on this happy occasion.

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● (1415)

HIV-AIDS

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to give thanks today to Stephen Lewis, a passionate voice for social justice, whether as Ontario leader of the NDP, at UNICEF, or, for the last five years, as the UN envoy for HIV-AIDS.

Lewis has focused the world's attention on this terrible pandemic and has especially decried the disproportionate impact on women. Last year alone, almost three million people died of AIDS, four million were newly infected with HIV, and millions of children are now orphaned.

The inaction of wealthy countries and the pharmaceutical companies is unspeakable. However, Lewis called the plan to create a new international agency for women "an unparalleled step forward in the march against the pandemic".

Stephen Lewis has been awarded the Order of Canada, 22 honorary degrees and the respect and admiration of millions around the world.

With his UN posting coming to an end, we pay tribute to Stephen Lewis for his courage, his tireless work and for inspiring so many people to act to end a pandemic.

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GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with \$7.3 billion in stealth neo-conservative cuts uncovered yesterday, more proof is surfacing that the government is hell bent on dismantling Canada's just society.

Let us check out those cuts: \$2.1 billion from improved student financial assistance; \$550 million from students with permanent disabilities and students from low income families; \$550 million from EnerGuide for low income households. All this is being done with an inherited \$13 billion surplus and the best economy in our history.

Oral Questions

That is just a start. Clearly the only minority that Conservatives care about is their miserable minority government. When will Conservatives stop dropping the hammer on vulnerable Canadians and start governing for all Canadians, especially those who could use a hand up?

Christmas might be a nice time for Canada's new heartless government to at least start thinking about those in need.

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[Translation]

HOLOCAUST CONFERENCE IN IRAN

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Europe still bears the scars of the Holocaust, the Shoah. The ruins of the former concentration camps are maintained to remind us of the deaths of 6 million Jews. They were exterminated in these camps, although their only crime was living. The moral conscience of humanity demands that we never forget.

However, a conference in Tehran is questioning the existence of the Holocaust. Despite documented testimony from survivors and executioners, and despite the photographs and film footage that capture the horrors that took place in those camps, some people still cast doubt on the incontrovertible evidence. Our fear is that this conference serves only to encourage one country's aggressive interests.

The Bloc Québécois joins Germany, Great Britain, the European Union and the United States in condemning, in the strongest words possible, the political takeover of the conference and the denial of this dark period in the history of humanity.

* * *

QUEBEC BRIDGE

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government has got everything wrong. That is particularly true for the Minister of Transport.

Last December 19, in a speech given in Quebec City, the Prime Minister said, and I quote, "It's not surprising when the Minister of Transport cannot even have a bridge painted".

Now, almost a year later, the current Conservative minister has had the brush in his hand for a year but seems to have forgotten to dip it into the paint, unless he has secretly decided to go with rust-coloured polka dots.

* * *

[English]

VOLUNTEERISM

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to speak about a brave little girl, Melissa Lilly, from my hometown of Angus in my riding of Simcoe—Grey. Tragically, this sweet nine year old has brain cancer, and my community has come together to help the family through this difficult time, particularly with the help of one of our town councillors, Sandie Macdonald.

The community raised over \$25,000 in a walkathon that took place on November 16. The money will help Melissa's mother

Carolyn stay in Toronto, where Melissa has up to seven months of treatment left.

I would like to commend the thoughtful efforts and hard work of the community and congratulate all those who have taken part in the fundraising, particularly the children from Angus Pine River Elementary School.

I am proud to represent the people of Angus, who have tried to give the Lilly family some normality through this difficult time.

I would like Melissa and her family to know that my thoughts and prayers and those of the entire community will be with them over Christmas and the coming months.

ORAL QUESTIONS

• (1420)

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is trying to hide from Canadians cuts to the tune of \$7.4 billion. However, thanks to access to information, we have foiled the Prime Minister's secret plans.

And this is what we found: a \$2.9 billion cut to assistance to post-secondary students and their families, as well as \$2.6 billion from research and development and \$700 million from energy conservation and the environment.

I want to know what the Prime Minister is most ashamed of: trying to hide these cuts from Canadians or going ahead with them and thereby penalizing Canadians and the Canadian economy?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, these were not phantom cuts, as the opposition leader and leader of the Liberal Party would have us believe.

Nonetheless, I can quote his member for Markham—Unionville, who promised in 2004 to strike a committee that would find \$12 billion in cuts. In February 2005, the hon. member said:

[English]

"There's no doubt you can't find \$12 billion or even a chunk of it without affecting jobs".

This government did not cut \$12 billion. This government did do some budgetary reductions and did them without cutting any jobs.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we did it without inflicting any harm on Canadians compared to what the Conservatives are doing. First they said in their budget that they would cut more than \$7 billion. They did not tell the Canadian people where they would do it because they were embarrassed to say it.

The Conservatives are embarrassed to say that they are the only government in the modern world to make cuts to students, research and development, and energy and climate change. The Prime Minister must be ashamed today. Does he not think it is shameful to make cuts to the economy of Canadians and the students of Canada?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. What the hon. member is talking about is not any programs that ever actually existed. What he is talking about is a bunch of promises that the Liberal government made year after year and never delivered on.

That is why this government did not cut those things. There were no such programs to cut in the first place.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): No, Mr. Speaker, it was booked. Everything was booked and everything was cut—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. We must have a little order. The Prime Minister is not going to be able to hear the question. I think it is directed to him. We must have some order so we can hear the question and then get an answer. The hon. Leader of the Opposition has the floor. We will have some order, please.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, everything was booked. I know the Conservatives are very ashamed of what they are doing—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. We have to get on with the question. The hon. Leader of the Opposition will want to put the question.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, beyond these figures, does the Prime Minister not realize that he is hitting students, the homeless and adult literacy programs? Does he not realize he is hitting Canadians with these cuts he is trying to hide from them?

[*English*]

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he says they were booked. As for that \$40 million missing in the sponsorship program, I am hoping that somebody over there will get booked as well.

These are things the Liberals promised the Canadian people for 13 years and never delivered.

[*Translation*]

Their record is an empty shell.

[*English*]

They are an empty shell. They have nothing to offer other than to promise the same things they failed to deliver before.

• (1425)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minority government continues to display false transparency. First, the Conservatives cut \$1 billion from programs for Canadians without ever assessing the effectiveness or pertinence of these cuts and without assessing the programs. Now they are making further cuts, which the government tried to slip under the radar in the recently tabled economic and financial update, without saying a word about it.

Can the Prime Minister tell us why he hid the truth from all Canadians?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

An hon. member: Calm down, you fools!

[*English*]

The Speaker: Order. The Minister of Finance has the floor to respond to the question. We are wasting a lot of time today in question period, which is not suitable for a Wednesday. The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is correct that we are spending on our priorities and not on a wish list that the Liberals published just before the last election, the third wish list that they published in 2005.

There were three sets of books in 2005 from the last government. We only have one set of books.

And yes, we are spending on our own priorities. To check on their books and what happened to the \$40 million, I guess we will have to call their bookie.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the current Conservative government seems to have forgotten that it voted unanimously, in this chamber, for Bill C-66, which contained specific projects such as the EnerGuide program and all sorts of projects to help the environment. The Conservatives voted for it at the time. They should not now be saying that they have not cut these programs. They cut them outright without an assessment.

We demand to see the assessment of the programs cut.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I stated yesterday with regard to environmental programs, we will have programs that lower emissions rather than increase them, as was the case with the other government.

With regard to these phantom cuts to non-existent programs, why did the Liberal Party hide its own programs from Canadians?

* * *

CIA AIRPLANES

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Maher Arar was deported to Syria, where he was tortured, in a CIA linked plane used for the illegal transportation of prisoners to detention centres where they are subjected to cruel treatment. These planes often stop over in Canada and in Europe. In Maher Arar's case, the plane stopped over in Italy.

Since the government has announced that it will inquire into three other cases similar to Maher Arar's, will the Prime Minister agree to broaden his inquiry to American planes that illegally transport prisoners and sometimes stop over in Canada?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the investigator can look into any issue connected to these allegations and these three cases, but I can say that the Government of Canada has examined the allegations and found no indication that any illegal activity took place.

Oral Questions

The government's organizations are aware of the allegations and are ensuring the continued application of international laws and appropriate procedures.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, those are exactly the same answers the previous government gave. Those are the same answers Maher Arar was given. They said there were no problems and that everything was done legally. Now we know differently.

Today, Maher Arar is asking us to get to the bottom of this and to broaden this inquiry to include the CIA prison planes. We know that many of them have landed in Canada. Those planes have flight numbers and landing records, and we are asking the government to broaden this inquiry and demand the full cooperation of the United States, as other countries, such as Italy, are doing. We want to know what happened.

•(1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the government is taking the allegations in all three cases seriously, and that is why the Minister of Public Safety set up a judicial inquiry.

The Leader of the Opposition made some very specific allegations. We looked for the facts to support them, but we found no basis for those specific allegations.

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there are more than just these three cases.

A report by the Canada Border Services Agency stated that no fewer than 20 prison planes linked to the CIA had made 74 stopovers in Canada in the past four years. The flight numbers, dates and landing sites in Canada are known.

What is the minister waiting for to investigate? He should not tell us that it was not illegal, because it was. It was one such plane that carried Maher Arar off to be tortured.

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Bloc Québécois is right when he says that the former government did nothing for Mr. Arar. It is true.

However, the Canada Border Services Agency and Transport Canada have looked at the issue of these planes that are supposedly linked to the CIA.

I can assure hon. members that the pilots provided the passenger lists to one of the reporting centres, along with each passenger's date of birth, citizenship, gender, place of residence and reason for travelling. We have all that information here.

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Safety's press secretary said in April that the Conservative government did not intend to do any additional checking.

If the minister is not willing to conduct an investigation himself, is he willing to broaden Mr. Justice Iacobucci's mandate to include investigating these prison planes? Not only has the European Parliament launched a commission of inquiry into this issue, but Italy is prosecuting CIA agents.

What is the minister waiting for to follow suit?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Justice Iacobucci's mandate does not include conducting such an investigation. But I can assure my colleague and friend that we will be vigilant with regard to this type of aircraft.

If we obtain any new information, I will share it with him and with all members.

* * *

[English]

EQUALIZATION

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems as though the Prime Minister and his government see Saskatchewan as nothing more than a pool for votes rather than a group of families with aspirations for their children.

The Premier of Saskatchewan, Mr. Calvert, met with the Prime Minister last week. Coming out of that meeting, he made it clear that it was obvious now that the government had no intention of honouring its promise to the people of Saskatchewan when it concerns equalization.

The Minister of Finance is going to meet with his colleagues the finance ministers in Vancouver next Friday. Will the Prime Minister stand in his place today and indicate crystal clear that he intends to honour his promise to the people of Saskatchewan when it comes to equalization?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Premier of Saskatchewan has taken a position on this that I do not accept. The government will fulfill its commitments in good faith.

At the same time, the Government of Canada is consulting with all provinces and territories to get their input on the new equalization formula and transfer payment rules that are fair to all provinces.

The leader of the NDP might want to indicate to the House whether he favours the position of the NDP Government of Saskatchewan to exclude natural resources or the position of the NDP Government of Manitoba to include natural resources.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this has to do with a promise made by the Prime Minister to the people of Saskatchewan, very directly, for fairness. He was rather specific about it. It looks to me like he is waffling now.

We hear the catcalls from the backbenches, but it is silence from the MPs from Saskatchewan on the government side of the House. They have not delivered anything to the people of Saskatchewan when it comes to fairness.

If it is not the Prime Minister, will anybody on that side of the House stand up for the people of Saskatchewan and say that the promise made will be a promise kept when it comes to fairness and equalization in Saskatchewan?

•(1435)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can say—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Oral Questions

The Speaker: Order, please. The right hon. the Prime Minister has the floor. It seems the Christmas spirit has taken a grip on some hon. members today.

The right hon. the Prime Minister has the floor. We will want to hear him.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, I can say with confidence that in the next budget the Government of Canada, with the help of our Conservative MPs from Saskatchewan, will deliver the best deal for Saskatchewan it has ever had in Confederation.

Whether it will justify the wasteful advertising campaign of the Government of Saskatchewan is another question. Whether at that point in time we will actually have a position from the NDP is another question.

However, since I may not be up again on my feet this year, let me just wish all members a merry Christmas and thank the NDP members for their help on the—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

* * *

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite what the Prime Minister said about phantom cuts, the cuts reveal a clear intention to slash investment in post-secondary education and in science. In so doing, that lays bare the very clear intention of the government to have no policy whatever on productivity and competitiveness.

Why is it that the government has no policy to create jobs today for Canadians in the future? Why is it that the government has no policy whatever to meet the competitive challenges this economy faces?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, not only do we have a policy, we have a plan called “Advantage Canada”. Not only do we have a plan called “Advantage Canada” that will try to address the lack of productivity growth in the last 10 years when the party opposite was the government, but our plan has the endorsement of the International Monetary Fund.

In the report issued today by the International Monetary Fund, it praises Canada's new government for its commitment to allocating unplanned surpluses to lower the debt, to increase productivity in Canada and to lower taxes.

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PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the ideological and meanspirited cuts by the minority government are without bounds. Conservatives have done nothing new to help Canadians with disabilities and they have taken a giant leap backward by slashing \$150 million which was scheduled to help persons with disabilities to access jobs.

The minister is supposed to be committed to the full inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of life. Could she explain how these cuts make Canada more inclusive and help disabled Canadians to find jobs?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I commend to the member opposite the report that was filed yesterday by the Minister of Finance's committee on disabilities. For the first time in the history of the country, we now have a potential initiative that will help parents with children with severe disabilities to save for their future, something the member's government could have done over the course of 13 years, which we have now done in the course of 10 months.

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is hard for students with disabilities. It is hard for them to qualify for college or university. It is hard for their families who are often low income because one parent has had to stay home to offer the extra care. We, as a government, put in \$550 million over five years to help them, money that was locked in, guaranteed. If we were the government today, it would be in the pockets of these students.

Instead, Canada's new government, new, ungenerous, small, pinched government, has done what it takes pride in doing, delivering cuts. These kids have fought hard to get their chance. Why?

● (1440)

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we need to know is where the Liberals locked up the money. In what brown bag did they lock up the money? Is it in the hands of their bookie, Alfonso Gagliano? We do not know where they locked up the money. Which set of books were they using, the first set, the second set or the third set?

We would rather actually do something for people with disabilities and we will.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, students were really shut out with that answer.

The only minority the Conservatives care about is their own minority government. Yesterday the Minister for the Status of Women defended her scandalous decision to close offices across the country, by claiming those in remote and rural communities could access programs via the Internet.

We now know that the meanspirited Conservative government is cutting \$100 million from rural and aboriginal broadband. The minister tells women to access their programs from the Internet and then cuts the Internet funding.

Will the minister give a real answer today as to how rural women will access her programs?

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if there could be no better example, so many members of this cabinet wanted to stand up for women and speak about it in the House today.

The reductions that the member opposite talks about are very clearly and very specifically decisions to sunset the program tabled by the former Liberal government. Women in remote and rural Canada deserve better and, on January 23, they elected better.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the CEO of Cogeco, Mr. Louis Audet, says that the Minister of Industry's decision to accelerate the deregulation of telecommunications only gives more power back to the large companies that have always dominated the market. He concluded that the minister's approach is faulty.

Will the Minister of Industry recognize that he is on the wrong track and that his decision will only encourage the development of monopolies that could set prices as high as they like, once they get rid of the competition?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know this. I read what the president of Cogeco said yesterday and I would like to quote him. "Thanks to the low operating costs of its Internet phone service, Cogeco will be able to compete with the old monopolies in the event of a price war".

Cogeco and all other businesses in the telecommunications industry are ready to face the competition and even engage in a price war, which, in the end, would benefit consumers.

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister's distortion of what Mr. Audet said is unacceptable. Mr. Audet stated that he is against the deregulation.

Not only did the minister take this decision without consulting anyone, but he is giving people 30 days, from December 15 to January 15, in the middle of the busy holiday period, to submit their opinion in writing. What a farce.

If the minister is serious about his desire to consult, I challenge him to hold public hearings. Is he prepared to take up the challenge? Will he hold public hearings to debate the drastic deregulation he wants to bring in?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is what Jim Shaw of Shaw Communications had to say about the reform we are putting forward.

[English]

We agree entirely with [the Minister of Industry] that the interest of consumers must come first.

That is what we are doing for Canadians. They are going to benefit from more competition, lower prices and better services.

* * *

[Translation]

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when asked yesterday whether he would be in favour of providing funding to Quebec City's Boîte à science, the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec said that before providing funding he will ensure that the project is viable so that CED does not have to subsidize the project year after year.

Can the minister explain why he is requiring that the Boîte à science be viable before he will fund it, when he does not require the

same from other science centres across Canada, in Newfoundland and Vancouver for example? Why this double standard?

• (1445)

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, maybe we are too close to Christmas and things are not being understood very well. I will repeat what I said.

The Boîte à science project is currently under review. It is asking for \$500,000. If we move forward with this, that money will be used for a feasibility study for the construction of a building that will cost \$30 million. This will be followed by funding.

What I am saying is that the study will have to show that the Boîte à science could be viable without funding from the CED for its operating costs.

* * *

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we have learned that the \$55 million cut on September 25 to youth employment programs will come strictly from the summer career placement program, which will affect young people, agencies and regions in particular.

On what study did the minister base her decision to make cuts to the summer career placement program, when the committee, of which her colleagues are members, asked for the program to be improved?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is true that we did commit, when we were elected, to reviewing all programs that were run by the previous government to ensure they were offering value for Canadian taxpayer money. In that process, we are looking for opportunities for improvement and we are hoping to be able to announce some.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the community action program for children and the Canada prenatal nutrition program provide essential services to low income and single parent Canadian families.

Will the government today commit to low income families in hundreds of Canadian communities, children who need these programs, that they will not be left out in the cold by more heartless, neo-conservative cuts?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the community access program is sunseting on December 31. Right now we are working on that. I can assure the member that all communities will have access to the Internet and to broadband.

*Oral Questions***TRADE**

Mr. Don Bell (North Vancouver, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the inexplicable cuts of the meanspirited, ideological government continue to baffle Canadians. The cuts have hurt Canada's ability to be competitive in a global market: \$250 million for the global success fund, \$109 million for our trade commissioners, and \$60 million to showcase Canada to the world. These are all gone. These cuts will hurt our Pacific gateway strategy to grow import and export businesses across Canada.

Why is the government determined to dismantle our strong economy by crippling—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know there was a wish list and there were several sets of books, three at least from the previous government. One other thing we know for sure is that \$40 million of taxpayers' money from hard-working Canadians is gone.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I know the hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence is very popular, but he is here to ask a question today and we all want to hear the question. We do not want to waste time. The hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence has the floor.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, allow me to wish all members a merry Christmas.

[*Translation*]

According to a number of scientific studies, consumer activity is responsible for 70% of greenhouse gases.

This government cut every initiative to encourage the public to take part in reducing greenhouse gases. For example, the EnerGuide program, or \$550 million, was cut altogether.

An hon. member: Shame!

Mr. Joseph Volpe: Why is this government asking the public to take action, when it is cutting all the tools available to them?

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us look at the facts. When I arrived in my department, there were literally hundreds of programs. Those members spent hundreds of millions of dollars. What did Canadians get for that? Greenhouse gases skyrocketed under the watch of that government.

The current leader of the Liberal Party, that member spent 10 years at the cabinet table when all those decisions were being made. He ended up at the cabinet table as the minister of the environment. What did Canadians get for those programs? They received nothing. They received nothing in greenhouse gas reductions and pollution increased. Our programs will deliver results for Canadians.

● (1450)

[*Translation*]

HOMELESSNESS

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the national homelessness initiative will end next March 31 but the minority Conservative government has refused to renew this important program.

Community groups want answers. In Laval, for example, the Association amicale des jeunes et parents AGAPÉ inc. used the initiative to renovate a building and house the homeless.

Again in Laval, L'Auberge du coeur L'Envolée helps homeless youth between the ages of 16 and 20 and is asking for the new spaces required in its establishment.

How can the government refuse to help the homeless?

[*English*]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the facts as usual are just the opposite from what the Liberals have presented.

The government cares very much about helping the homeless. That is why one of our very first actions was to spend the full amount of money and renew the amount of money that was in the budget, almost \$135 million, to help those who are most unfortunate and need to find new homes because they are homeless. We also added \$37 million that the previous government did not see fit to spend on the homeless.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the old Liberal government never tackled the problem of modernizing the fishing industry in spite of repeated requests from the provinces and others. Strong conservation and protection measures are needed to ensure the sustainability of marine resources.

The Fisheries Act of 1868 needs to be overhauled. Could the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans update the House on his plans for a new Fisheries Act?

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me assure the hon. member that the government is very supportive of conservation. The government will also ensure political accountability. The government will protect our fish stocks. The act is 138 years old. Part of the coastline was not even in Confederation when it was brought in. That is why today I will be tabling a new fisheries act.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister promised that patient wait time guarantees would be one of his government's key commitments. Since the election his Minister of Health has been invisible and ineffective. The Wait Time Alliance today reminded the Conservatives about their most famous broken promise.

Oral Questions

There are only 18 days left to announce a meaningful commitment to Canadians who are waiting for treatment and surgery. Will the Minister of Health make an early new year's resolution and pledge to meet his own deadline of December 31?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member that this is about wait time targets. Indeed, all 10 provinces are already either meeting the accelerated deadline or are well on their way to doing so. Three have already announced the target that she is referring to. Three have indicated they will do so very soon. Two are working on targets they already established in 2004 and two have indicated that they are using common benchmarks. This is another promise made, another promise kept.

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the clock keeps ticking and time is running out for the Minister of Health.

The minor pilot projects he has announced so far are not what Canadians had in mind when they were promised reduced wait times across the board. That is why the Wait Time Alliance report card in November gave the Conservatives a D for failing to establish a timetable for achieving targets.

Will the Minister of Health ever keep the promise made during the last campaign or should Canadians expect another lump of coal from the Conservatives in their Christmas stockings?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the targets are on target. Indeed, the government showed leadership for this country by establishing the two first wait time guarantees in the history of this country, both on reserve, both targeting people at risk, whether it be prenatal care or diabetes care. We are leading by example.

If the hon. member cares so much about it, she should resign her seat, run for the provincial legislature, and get elected in the Government of British Columbia and establish the targets with the Government of Canada.

* * *

●(1455)

STATUS OF WOMEN

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the women of Canada are angry. They even have a website, thewomenareangry.org. Before, the minister responsible said she was cutting waste. Now she says there are no cuts. The women are angry because indeed \$5 million has been cut.

Now we learn that individual Conservative MPs have offered funding to the shelters and transition houses in their Conservative ridings from a slush fund resulting from these non-cuts, as long as the women promise to shut up.

Could the Prime Minister tell the House how he can defend this blatant act of political favouritism?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am almost speechless with that amount of falsity. It is a misleading misconception of the government.

Let me tell Canadians about this government compared to the former Liberal government. This government does not have a boys' weekend to develop policy. This government does not have a ladies' lunch to come up with a pink book. This government does not appoint women to run in politics. This government says every woman will earn her nomination from the grassroots in every riding across Canada.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Liberal attempts to build a just society have been attacked, torn apart, and left in ruins by this meanspirited ideological government. The communities and institutional building program provided incentives to commercial businesses and public institutions to improve the energy efficiency of buildings across this country. The government simply did not care. With the stroke of a pen, it eliminated \$78 million of funding.

Why will the Minister of Natural Resources not help Canada's workplaces and make them more energy efficient, and give us a real answer for a change?

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the facts are the facts. The facts are that you spent hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money, and what are the results? The results are, by your own numbers, that greenhouse gases are up 35% above your own targets. You never reduced any type of pollutants out of the atmosphere. The Liberals did nothing. The truth is, your record is pathetic on—

The Speaker: I know that the hon. the Minister of Natural Resources will remember, the next time he answers a question, to address the Chair because I do not think he meant my record.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' \$50 million cut to the Canada Health Infoway shows how little the government cares about public health care. It is the key to better service because it allows for standard electronic health records, telehealth and public health surveillance. These programs are critical for care, especially in rural and northern Canada, and play an integral part in reducing wait times.

Why is the Minister of Health tearing apart a program that provides quality and uniform access to public health care for all Canadians?

Oral Questions

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is incorrect. In fact, we are fully funding Canada Health Infoway. We consider it a key component of the government's agenda for electronic health records. I encourage the hon. member to check her facts. We are delivering on our health care promises. After 13 years in power, the former government, the Liberal Party, made a whole lot of promises on health care and wait times were doubled.

* * *

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government does not care about young Canadians learning about the rest of the world. In fact, the only minority it cares about is its meanspirited, fragile minority government.

The Liberal government booked \$150 million for scholarships to send Canadian youth abroad to study and to bring the best and brightest from around the world to study at Canadian universities.

Yet, because of its meanspirited and ideological cuts, the current government is systematically dismantling opportunities for young Canadians. How can the government be so shortsighted?

• (1500)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have listened with some amusement during question period to all this line of questioning which seems to be, "You broke our promises". Let me assure the House that these promises were broken by the Liberal Party long before we got to office. If the Liberal Party is ever to return to office, it has to be honest about its past and honest with Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on December 15, General Dynamics, an American arms company, will take over SNC-Tec. During negotiations last summer, serious concerns were raised regarding the Patriot Act and protection of the personal information of workers at these plants.

Can the Prime Minister reassure us by confirming that the personal information of the workers will not be accessed under the American Patriot Act?

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree completely with my colleague from Quebec.

Personal information is very important to the Canadian population. The responsibility of the Government of Canada is to do everything possible to protect this information.

* * *

FURNITURE INDUSTRY

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the rising Canadian dollar and strong competition from developing countries have caused major job losses in the furniture industry over the past few years.

For some years now, the Bloc Québécois has been asking the federal government to implement an assistance plan to help the furniture industry adapt.

Will the Minister of Industry release an action plan soon to help this industry face the new reality?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it appears my hon. colleague has not read the latest budget we tabled in the House. We reduced taxes and income taxes for all Canadians and for businesses to help them become more competitive.

I am currently in talks with the textile industry.

This government cares about the textile industry and will see what it can do to help in the near future.

* * *

[English]

LITERACY

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government's recent cuts to literacy are no way to build a country. In Cape Breton and across Canada the Liberal government invested to tackle low literacy rates, supporting groups like the Adult Learning Association of Cape Breton.

Will the minister of cuts to human resources and social development apologize to the 6,000 adult Nova Scotians currently in literacy programs and reinstate the money she took away?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is the former Liberal government that owes the apologies to Canadians. The Liberals are the ones who paid groups \$750 a day to program a website. They are the ones who paid \$150,000 to an executive director. They are the ones who paid one group \$34,000 to design a logo when we are trying to help adults read letters, not pictures.

* * *

CANADA POST

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, rural constituents in my riding have told me that their mail delivery is a mess. Canadians depend upon reliable, timely delivery of their mail regardless of where they live. Rural Canadians are worried about changes to rural mail delivery being undertaken by Canada Post.

Could the minister responsible for Canada Post update the House on rural mail delivery and remailers?

Routine Proceedings

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question from my colleague. Both rural mail delivery and international remailers are very important issues. Canada's new government is issuing a directive today to Canada Post.

First, the government has determined and decided to maintain traditional rural mail delivery for all Canadians from coast to coast. Second, in terms of the international remailers, I will review the span and the scope of the problem, and we will examine options, legislative options—

• (1505)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

* * *

[Translation]

COURT CHALLENGES PROGRAM

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on September 25, the Conservative government announced that it was doing away with the court challenges program, a decision made without debate or consultation and which violates the Official Languages Act.

Members of francophone communities from St. John's to Vancouver came to testify before the Standing Committee on Official Languages. The development of their communities is at stake.

Will the President of the Treasury Board finally listen to French Canadians and reinstate the court challenges program, yes or no?

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very important to emphasize the support of this party and of this government for the Official Languages Act. We respect its regulations and it is very important to provide services in each province. It is very important and we will continue to support the official languages.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if we have French schools throughout Canada it is not because of the Liberals but because of court challenges. The Conservative government has eliminated the tools used by francophones in Canada to ensure that there are infrastructures in place permitting them to live in French.

Will the Conservative government reinstate the court challenges program to provide the tools and the infrastructure? Yes or no?

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government will continue to support and is a strong supporter of the vitality of our linguistic communities in all regions of Canada. We are strong supporters of the Official Languages Act. It is of great importance to all members of this caucus.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[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 responses to three petitions.

* * *

SENATE APPOINTMENT CONSULTATIONS ACT

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-43, An Act to provide for consultations with electors on their preferences for appointments to the Senate.

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

* * *

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-44, An Act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act.

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

* * *

• (1510)

FISHERIES ACT, 2007

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-45, An Act respecting the sustainable development of Canada's seacoast and inland fisheries.

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

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INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Tom Wappel (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-China Legislative Association respecting its participation in the ninth bilateral consultations held in Beijing, Guangzhou, Macau and Hong Kong, from October 7 to 15, 2006.

I encourage the government to review this report of one of our major and important trading partners so that we have an excellent relationship with the People's Republic of China.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian interparliamentary delegation to the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas, Canadian Section, respecting its participation in the fifth plenary meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas held in Bogota, Colombia, from November 19 to 21, 2006.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian parliamentary delegation of the Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association respecting its participation in the election observation mission held in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, from July 28 to August 1, 2006.

* * *

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights which deals with the issue of solicitation laws.

I would like to thank the members of the subcommittee, the chairman and all the clerks and analysts for their very hard work on finalizing this report.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

Mr. Tom Wappel (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

The committee examined the qualifications and competence of the nominee and agreed that the nomination of Robert Marleau as Information Commissioner of Canada be concurred in. It was unanimous.

[*Translation*]

FINANCE

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Finance entitled “Parliamentary Review of the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency Act: A Value Proposition or a Failed Experiment”.

[*English*]

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2) and Section 89 of the Canada Revenue Agency Act, your committee has undertaken the statutory review in the first five years of the Canada Revenue Agency Act.

In closing, I would just like to thank all the people who made this possible, because we have been working on this for the last two parliamentary sessions. I want to thank the research staff and of

course the clerks and the translator for getting the report out in 24 hours.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. I want to thank all members of the committee for their cooperation.

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

Hon. Diane Marleau (Sudbury, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

The committee has considered the matter of implementation of accrual budgeting and appropriations in the federal government. This report was passed unanimously by all parties who worked on it. I want to thank everyone for doing such great work.

● (1515)

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the duty to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on International Trade. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), your committee considered the subject of the textile and clothing industry in Canada and agreed to present this report to the House.

[*Translation*]

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the twenty-sixth report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

[*English*]

This report concerns the committee's order of reference of Tuesday, November 8, 2006, Bill C-31, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Public Service Employment Act.

[*Translation*]

The committee has considered Bill C-31 and has agreed to report it with amendments.

[*English*]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), to present reports seven through ten from the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Suffice it to say, we have been busy as little beavers in that committee. Presenting four reports at one time is unprecedented in this House. I would like to thank everyone for the super job they did in getting this work done, the clerks, the researchers, all the members of the committee. Best wishes of the season to all.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, two reports.

Routine Proceedings

First of all, I present the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development in relation to its study on Canada's role in complex international interventions that involve multiple foreign policy instruments, focusing on Canada's efforts in Haiti.

I also have the honour and the privilege to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development in relation to the whole of government's strategy for failed states.

I wish all our clerks and everyone who worked on these reports a very merry Christmas. Mr. Speaker, I also wish you a very merry Christmas and all the best for the new year.

The Speaker: The hon. member is too kind.

INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology regarding its order of reference of Monday, November 6, 2006, Bill C-26, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (criminal interest rate).

The committee has considered Bill C-26 and reports the bill without amendment.

Merry Christmas, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

[English]

In accordance with its order of reference of Thursday, September 21, 2006, your committee considered and held hearings on the subject matter of Bill C-11, An Act to amend the Canada Transportation Act and the Railway Safety Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, and agreed on Tuesday, December 12, 2006, to report it with amendments.

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

* * *

[English]

INFORMATION COMMISSIONER

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, in accordance with section 54(1) of the act to extend the present laws of Canada that provide access to information under the control of the Government of Canada,

Chapter A-1 of the Revised Statutes of Canada, 1985, this House approve the appointment of Robert Marleau as Information Commissioner.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

● (1520)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HUMAN RESOURCES, SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities be the committee for the purposes of section 44 of the Employment Equity Act.

(Motion agreed to)

PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think you would also find consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding the orders made on Tuesday, April 25, 2006, and Thursday, June 22, 2006, the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security be authorized to continue its deliberations relating to its review of the Anti-Terrorism Act (2001) beyond December 22, 2006, and to present its final report no later than February 28, 2007.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

AGE OF CONSENT

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions. The first one is from 170 petitioners in the Scarborough, Ontario area who call upon Parliament to take measures necessary to immediately raise the age of sexual consent from 14 to 16 years of age.

MARRIAGE

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition from petitioners in the Scarborough area involving some 70 persons calls upon Parliament to repeal or amend the Marriage for Civil Purposes Act in order to promote and defend marriage as the lawful union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition on traditional marriage.

*Routine Proceedings**[English]*

The petition which calls upon the government to reflect the accurate definition of the word “marriage” as being a relationship between one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others while retaining similar civil benefits for same sex couples.

[Translation]

MEXICAN FEDERAL POLICE

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present, today, a petition on the repression used by the Mexico's federal police in Oaxaca. The signatories of the petition denounce the climate of terror that has reigned since a teacher's strike in June. This petition, signed by 89 people, calls on the House of Commons to look into the situation and exert pressure in order to resolve this dispute through discussion and negotiation and not through excessive force.

I also want to thank Sylvie Dusseault for drafting this petition. She has my support.

[English]

AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to present a petition today, at the end of a petition drive, containing 40,000 signatures concerning the CAW drive. It is a petition to the Government of Canada for a new automotive trade policy.

The petitioners are concerned that if we enter into this agreement we will lose more automotive jobs. They are calling upon the Government of Canada to deliver an automotive policy and to ensure that Canada does not enter into a lopsided Korea trade deal that will cost more Canadian manufacturing jobs.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table a petition this afternoon containing names of residents in my riding of York West and the surrounding GTA.

The petitioners recognize that religious persecution is an international crisis affecting many religious groups in countless countries of the world and that the persecution of groups for their religious beliefs is immoral, unjust and violates an individual's fundamental right to religious freedom.

The petitioners call upon the federal government to develop an automatic array of interventions that may be imposed by Canada against foreign governments, such as Iraq, that may support religious persecution or fail to prevent it, and to improve measures for refugees who have suffered religious persecution.

● (1525)

DANGEROUS OFFENDERS

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 I have the privilege of presenting this petition on behalf of hundreds of my constituents who are calling upon the government to amend the Criminal Code to lengthen the sentencing for dangerous offenders, especially pedophile offenders.

[Translation]

RAIL TRANSPORT

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I am tabling another petition—and not necessarily the last one—from people in the riding of Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, who are asking the federal government to do no less than take necessary measures to ensure that rail passenger and freight services be maintained and enhanced in the Gaspé, which involves the acquisition of the Matapédia-Chandler line as well as Via Rail's capital and operating budgets.

[English]

WAR OBJECTORS

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to table today a petition signed by over 7,200 Canadians and residents of Canada who call upon the government to demonstrate its commitment to international law and the treaties to which it is a signatory by making a provision for U.S. war objectors to have sanctuary in this country.

They note that in the past, notably during the Vietnam war, Canada, as a matter of official policy, provided refuge for militarism for over 50,000 Americans who refused to serve in an immoral war. They assert that those Americans, who are now refusing to fight in the illegal war in Iraq, are people of great conscience, that the majority of Canadians do not support the illegal war in Iraq, that the Government of Canada did not support the war in Iraq and that the war resisters should receive a welcome in Canada.

HIV-AIDS

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the privilege of presenting a petition signed by 248 congregants of the Pickering Village United Church on the subject of HIV-AIDS in Africa.

The petition calls upon the Government of Canada to expedite the production and export of anti-retroviral drugs to Africa.

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to present this petition on behalf of constituents and other Canadians.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to enact legislation that would recognize unborn children as separate victims of crime when they are injured or killed during the commission of an offence against their mothers, therefore allowing two charges to be laid in such a situation instead of one.

This has stemmed from the situation with Olivia Talbot of Edmonton, who was shot and killed in November 2005, and her 27 week old unborn son, Lane Jr., who was also killed in that incident.

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

CANADA POST

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table a petition from citizens in my riding who are protesting the closure of their Canada Post office, which is the only one in Verdun.

For a number of years now, Canada Post has been moving toward privatizing its client services by transferring them to private points of sale. This began while the Liberals were in power, and citizens in my riding are disappointed to see that it is continuing under the Conservatives.

[English]

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition today in the House on behalf of 290 residents of my constituency and from Summerside, P.E.I. supporting Remembrance Day as a national holiday.

AGE OF CONSENT

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table a petition today signed by 25 of my constituents. These constituents are claiming that the existing law regarding the age of sexual consent remains at 14 years of age. They are saying that Bill C-22 was tabled to raise the age of consent from 14 to 16 years and this petition lobbies the federal government to raise the age of sexual consent to 18 years.

LABELLING OF ALCOHOL BEVERAGES

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present three petitions. Two petitions deal with a long-standing matter before the House, which is the question of labels on alcohol beverage containers indicating that drinking during pregnancy can be dangerous.

It is a motion that was passed by Parliament that is still awaiting action and these petitioners want to see the government act on what Parliament has adopted.

● (1530)

AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is in reference to the new automotive trade policy. It is a petition that many New Democrats have signed and presented to the House. It calls for the cancellation of negotiations for a free trade agreement with Korea and the development of a new automotive trade policy.

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have four petitions that I would like to present today.

The first one is from 568 people in Manitoba who call upon the government to make it illegal for Internet service providers to allow child pornography on their sites.

The second petition is from 209 of my constituents who are asking the government to do everything in its power to limit child abuse,

child pornography and child trafficking and to ensure Internet luring does not happen.

AGE OF CONSENT

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the third petition is signed by 388 constituents of mine who are calling upon the government to raise the age of consent from 14 to 16 years old.

PROTECTION OF CHILDREN

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my final petition has 249 signatures from my constituency asking the government to use all necessary means to limit child trafficking, Internet luring, child prostitution and to raise the age of consent from 14 to 16.

AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present three identical petitions containing many signatories who are calling upon the Government of Canada to cancel negotiations for a free trade agreement with Korea, which would worsen the already one way flood of automotive products onto the Canadian market.

[Translation]

SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleagues from Beauharnois—Salaberry and Vaudreuil—Soulanges for tabling this petition from a group of organizations working on homelessness in the upper St. Lawrence region.

It truly saddens me to have to ask the government, yet again, to renew the SCPI, the national homelessness initiative.

This petition emphasizes the fact that our region needs a flexible, renewable subsidy program that enables community organizations to take more creative approaches to effective, long term intervention targeting the causes and consequences of homelessness, specifically in the Suroît region.

[English]

HOMELESSNESS

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure and an honour to present a petition from over 600 residents of Ottawa who are calling upon the government to commit funding in the upcoming budget for the homeless initiative for the next five years.

UGANDA

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is also a pleasure and an honour to present a petition from constituents on the situation in northern Uganda. The petitioners are calling upon Canada to take leadership in Uganda on this issue and to support the people who are living in misery in northern Uganda.

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour today to table a petition on behalf of 57 of my constituents of Kelowna—Lake Country who draw to the attention of the government the situation in northern Uganda regarding the child soldiers.

Children cannot speak for themselves and each one of us here should try to help them. No child should face the threat of being kidnapped and forced to fight in a war.

I want to wish a Merry Christmas to everyone.

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure to present a petition today which was brought to my attention by a constituent of mine, Mr. David MacDonald, whose cousin's son was brutally attacked and murdered at a house party. The sentences received were minimal. His concern is shared by many people in my riding, especially in light of the McEvoy report of Justice Merlin Nunn last week.

The petitioners are calling upon the government to re-evaluate the sentences handed to criminals and ensure that sentences are adequate in comparison to the crime, regardless of age, class or race.

FALUN GONG

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and present two petitions on behalf of the citizens of Edmonton Centre.

The first petition calls upon the government and Parliament to urge the Chinese regime to end the persecution of Falun Gong and release all Falun Gong practitioners immediately, to take active measures to help stop mass killing and organ harvesting of Falun Gong practitioners, and to discourage Canadians from travelling to China for organ transplants.

AGE OF CONSENT

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my second petition urges the Government of Canada assembled in Parliament to take all measures necessary to immediately raise the age of sexual consent from 14 to 16 years of age.

SRI LANKA

Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, petitioners from Oak Ridges—Markham urge the Government of Canada to send a strong message to the government of Sri Lanka to cease its military offensive immediately, to allow international relief agencies to enter Tamil areas to provide humanitarian aid to the affected civilian population, to stop shelling and bombing civilian habitat, and to allow international monitors to investigate the massacres of Tamil aid workers as well.

• (1535)

[Translation]

VOLUNTEERISM

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table a petition signed by 2,011 young Canadian volunteers who are calling on Parliament to address this issue in order to facilitate volunteerism both in Canada and abroad. I am therefore tabling this petition.

[English]

SRI LANKA

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions to present.

Routine Proceedings

My first petition is from residents who are very concerned over the senseless bombing of 61 schoolgirls in an orphanage in Sri Lanka and the massacre of 17 Tamil volunteer workers who belonged to the Paris-based international group, Action Against Hunger. The petitioners call upon the government to pressure the government of Sri Lanka to allow international relief agencies to enter Tamil areas to provide basic food and medicine to civilian populations.

POVERTY

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my second petition is from people who are very concerned that Canada's social transfer be strengthened to redress poverty, especially among women, and to transform our income security systems and improve social programs.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my third petition is from residents of Quebec who are very concerned that Canada has fallen so far behind in meeting its targets for Kyoto. The petitioners call upon the government to reconsider its decision about Kyoto and to meet its international obligations in this regard.

AGE OF CONSENT

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour today to present two petitions on behalf of the people of my riding. The first group of petitioners calls upon Parliament to immediately raise the age of sexual consent from 14 to 16 years of age.

FALUN GONG

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second group of petitioners calls upon the government and this Parliament to investigate the treatment of Falun Gong practitioners in China.

* * *

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Question Nos. 112 and 114 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Government Orders

[Text]

Question No. 112—**Ms. Denise Savoie:**

With respect to government spending on adult literacy: (a) to what year(s) was the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development referring in her statement in the House on September 26, 2006, specifically “we are spending over \$80 million a year on literacy programs for adults”; (b) what was the precise spending, broken down by program, in each province and territory, for literacy programs for adults in each year from 2004-2005, what is the spending for the current year, and what is the anticipated spending in each year from 2007-2008; (c) what is the government's position with respect to public funding of non-delivery program supports, capacity building, professional development for literacy practitioners, material and resource development and the promotion of literacy programming in communities; and (d) how does the government intend to ensure that the delivery of adult literacy programs is effective, efficient, of high quality and universally accessible to every Canadian who needs it?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 114—**Ms. France Bonsant:**

With respect to the Adult Learning, Literacy and Essential Skills Program: (a) what funding is still being allocated to this program; (b) what are the criteria for obtaining funding through this program; and (c) how much is being paid out through this program, by province, to the recipient organizations?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

PREBUDGET CONSULTATIONS

The House resumed from December 12 consideration of the motion.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to speak to the prebudget consultation report of the Standing Committee on Finance.

I want to begin by thanking the literally thousands of Canadians who presented or attended prebudget consultations held both here in Ottawa and right across the country.

Writing a budget is obviously about making choices. Every day, average Canadians make choices about what they can and cannot

afford. The Government of Canada is no different. The demand for funding is virtually infinite, but the resources of government are not.

I believe that Canadians pay too much in taxes. I believe that these high taxes are seriously impacting on Canada's overall competitiveness in a very negative way. In this regard, several of the presentations made to the committee stood out for me. I would like to take some time to share those presentations with the House.

With respect to productivity, Roger Martin, dean of the Rotman School of Management, spoke to the failings of the previous government in addressing competitiveness through its budgetary planning. He pointed out, in fact, that in 1998 Canada stood sixth in the international ranking of competitiveness. In 2001, we stood at 11. Today, we have fallen to 16. Over the years, we have drifted down in the rankings as countries such as Norway and Japan have stepped up their competitiveness.

These words came back to me when the finance minister appeared before the committee and presented the fiscal update entitled “Advantage Canada”. I was encouraged to hear of the five Canadian advantages that the plan specifically outlined. I will share them with the House.

To begin with, the finance minister spoke of a tax advantage. This is important. Canada's tax advantage will reduce taxes for all Canadians and establish the lowest tax rate on new business investment in the G-7. We have to attract investment. We have all heard of manufacturing jobs that are potentially leaving Canada and going elsewhere. This government wants to stem that flow. We want to encourage new investment and build industry and business.

The second point that he spoke of was the fiscal advantage. Canada's fiscal advantage will eliminate Canada's total government net debt in less than a generation, creating a strong foundation on which to build sustainable prosperity.

I note that today the International Monetary Fund has specifically commended the finance minister for his commitment and the commitment of this government. I would like to read for members a bit of what the IMF said in its statement:

The International Monetary Fund endorsed Canada's strategy to use surplus revenue to become the first Group of Seven nation whose outstanding debt doesn't exceed its assets.

This speaks to the government's determination and the incredible accomplishment that it has promised. We have not just talked about it; we promised it to Canadians by 2021. The statement goes on:

The Canadian fiscal strategy “appropriately highlights the joint role of public pension plans and provincial-territorial governments in achieving a sustainable fiscal position”....

Canada would join countries including Australia, Norway and Finland that have eliminated their net debt, based on figures from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

I believe I just mentioned some of those nations when I was speaking about nations that have improved their productivity. That speaks to the importance of eliminating the net debt.

The third point was about the entrepreneurial advantage:

Canada's Entrepreneurial Advantage will reduce unnecessary regulation and red tape and lower taxes to unlock business investment.

Government Orders

We heard about this time and time again. Groups like the Canadian Federation of Independent Business came forward and said that government simply must get out of the way. We can do better, they said, and we can employ more and pay more and grow if government would take away the reins that are holding us back and reduce the red tape.

This type of announcement was welcomed by businesses. I know that it was welcomed by my own chamber of commerce in Peterborough, and I understand that the chambers of commerce in St. Catharines, Burlington and right across this country have said that this is exactly what we need.

● (1540)

The fourth point spoke to a knowledge advantage. When we are talking about a knowledge advantage, we are talking about creating the best educated and most skilled workforce in the world, a flexible workforce that can move and that can address the needs of a growing, expanding economy.

Canada is an emerging world economic superpower. We are an energy superpower. We need the workforce that will address that. That is what the knowledge advantage speaks to. I was delighted with this. There are items that as a group in the committee we do not always agree on, but if there was one thing that we did agree on, it was that we need to invest in education.

I see that my colleague, the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, is here, and I know that this is one thing that we agree on: a dedicated transfer for post-secondary education. We feel it is incredibly important to take this out of the social transfer, to tag that money and to give it to the provinces so they understand that this money is for post-secondary education.

We want to improve access. We want to improve affordability. We want to improve the overall quality of education. Not only is it important that people can get in to be schooled, but they also have to get a quality education.

The other thing we need to address is skilled trades. When we speak of post-secondary education, we mean education in all its forms, not just what we get at college and university but the type of education that one would get after high school, because we need to encourage more skilled trades in this country. We have a terrible deficit and the knowledge advantage is incredibly important in moving Canada forward.

Last is the infrastructure advantage. Canada's infrastructure advantage will create modern, world class infrastructure to ensure the seamless flow of people, goods and services across our roads and bridges, through our ports and gateways and via our public transit.

Once again, we know that Canada has changed a great deal over the last number of years. When we speak about public transit and the need for public transit, we are talking about being good to the environment. We are talking about being responsible in regard to the amount of traffic. We are talking about improving the flow of goods.

The Pacific gateway, for example, an enormous undertaking of this government, will really open up that Asia Pacific market and allow for economic growth for Canada. It is part of the infrastructure improvements that we are undertaking.

Advantage Canada is focused on four core principles. I would like to review those with the House as well.

One principle is focusing government. Government should be focused on what it does best. That is exactly what this government intends to do. We are going to be responsible in how we spend, effective in our operations and our results, and accountable to taxpayers.

Often we hear from the opposition that we are being very narrow. There is a big difference between being narrow, quite frankly, and being focused. One should not confuse the two. Focus will help us accomplish our objectives. It has nothing to do with being narrow. I think Canadians understand and appreciate that.

The second point is on creating new opportunities and choices for people. Under that heading, it speaks to government's creation of incentives for people to excel right here at home in Canada. We will reduce taxes and invest in education, training and transition to work on opportunities so that Canadians can achieve their potential.

We often hear of a welfare wall in Canada. We want to help people get over that welfare wall. We want to reduce the gap that has expanded between rich and poor and we want to provide more opportunity. We want everybody to be able to dream and to envision themselves getting further ahead. That is so incredibly important to this government.

We want to invest for sustainable growth. Under this heading, we are talking about government investing in and seeking partnerships, both with the provinces and the private sector, in so-called P3 strategic investments. These types of P3 investments can help us to be very efficient. We are not just going to go with only P3 investments for growth, but we are going to look at them, and where it makes sense, that is the way we will go.

● (1545)

In Peterborough a number of issues I believe are absolutely critical for my riding, and they would be P3 investments. I speak of passenger rail service for Peterborough and improving the rail line that connects Peterborough to the GTA. I speak of Highway 407, a highway currently also called the ETR or express toll route. When that highway goes through to Highway 115, it will dramatically improve Peterborough's opportunity, indeed, our entire region's opportunity for economic expansion. These are both P3 operations.

The other thing I was quite excited about was the announcement with respect to the Windsor border that was in "Advantage Canada". As we know, the Detroit-Windsor crossing is the busiest crossing between Canada and the United States. Nothing has been done on that file for a long time, even though there has been demand for some 40 years to improve that border crossing. "Advantage Canada" made a commitment to improve that crossing by 2012 and that will be a tremendous benefit not only to the Windsor area but to all of southwestern and central Ontario and to Canada's overall gross domestic product as well.

Government Orders

We also talked about freeing business to grow and succeed. This is what I alluded to when I talked about removing the reins from business. We need to create an atmosphere. Government does not necessarily have to create the economy. What we have to do is create an atmosphere where that economy can flourish. That is what we mean when we talk about freeing business to grow and succeed.

I think we can all agree that “Advantage Canada” is a focused plan that will specifically help our nation re-establish itself as a world leader in competitiveness. This will help us attract foreign investment, new industry and provide good paying meaningful employment for Canadians and improve the overall quality of life for Canadians.

I will to refer a couple of specific examples in the report that was put together by the finance committee. It is important to recognize that the Government of Canada has made significant strides already toward improving Canada's overall productivity in our first budget, budget 2006. We announced a number of tax cuts, removed \$655,000 low income Canadians from the federal tax roll entirely with the announcements and reduced the GST by one percentage point.

I will to share with the House what Peter Woolford of the Retail Council of Canada had to say about reducing the GST. He specifically stated:

—that one policy move by the government did more than twice as much for Canadians' real disposable incomes than they'd been able to do for themselves over the last 15 years, and more than was done for themselves in a strong economy in 2005. This was a very powerful tool for increasing the incomes of Canadians.

It sounds like the government is on the right track.

Further, one of the hon. opposition members spoke yesterday about how he did not understand why there was a GST cut. I suppose he would have to be clear with the House as to whether he would recommend a GST increase. That would be very bad for the economy, household incomes and the ability of people to purchase goods. I am speaking of working families. We on this side of the House talk a lot about helping working families and low income Canadians. We feel this was a tremendous tool that helped us do that.

There were a number of items in the prebudget consultation with which we had a problem, specifically items that spoke about rolling back some of the advances that the Government of Canada made in budget 2006. We need to ask these questions. Would the opposition would cancel the fitness tax credit or the transit pass tax credit? Would it roll back the \$1,000 Canada employment credit? These questions have not been answered.

● (1550)

Some of the recommendations in the report call for billions of dollars in additional spending and there is no plan for how we would afford that. That brings me to responsible spending.

We know that in the last five years total spending grew by an average of 8.2% annually under the previous government. In fact, in 2004-05, the growth in spending was actually 14.4%, which is about seven times inflation, as we all know. It is certainly not something that can be maintained over the long term. This is why we speak about focusing government, focusing the spending of government

and being very responsible with taxpayer dollars. This will help us reduce the overall tax burden for all Canadians.

I will share with the House what Yves Morency, the vice-president of Caisse Desjardins, said to the finance committee on October 25. He said:

The message we want to send is that you should continue in this direction. That will improve productivity, which will enhance the wealth of businesses, individuals and the government, because tax revenues will increase.

He said that cutting taxes would increase overall government revenues, and that is important. We need to understand the tax reductions and tax revenues for the government are not necessarily linked. Economics teaches us that.

He further went on to say:

—we encourage you to continue along this path. You mustn't stop; you must go even further in order to achieve the competitiveness levels of our main neighbours...

Of course he is speaking of the United States. He is speaking of the Asia-Pacific Rim. These are nations that we now actively compete with on a day to day basis.

In reducing the tax burden, we see in “Advantage Canada” a very good linkage that will link paying down Canada's debt, or our mortgage, with reductions in income taxes. Canadians have said that they like the idea of paying off the debt, but what it is in it for them? How does that benefit them?

Canada's new government specifically came out and itemized for people how it would benefit them. The \$700 million that we have saved in interest this year, by paying off \$13.2 billion of debt, will go to Canadians in income tax savings and we will continue to do that each and every year. By 2010, it will amount to \$1.4 billion, almost \$6 billion in income tax savings by 2010. That is an achievement. Canadians are going to see why paying down debt is going to help them.

David Dodge spoke to the finance committee on the importance of paying off debt. He said that it was extraordinarily important that, in periods when revenues are a little stronger than anticipated, we use the opportunity to pay down debt. He said that was how it was supposed to work. He did not say to come up with a frivolous spending program. He did not say to grow government spending by 14.4% in a single year. He said to pay the debt down. That will help us be competitive. That will help us reduce people's taxes.

When we talk about fiscal balance, our government recognizes that there was a fiscal imbalance, and we are moving toward fiscal balance. That will be in budget 2007. If we address the fiscal imbalance, we recognize that we will have a more competitive economic union, and that is important.

Government Orders

We talk about creating equal opportunities for Canadians. I want to speak to a very specific group of Canadians that is struggling, and that is the farmers. Farmers in Canada have suffered from 10 years of poor agricultural leadership and planning. They are in a difficult position. Canada's new government is working on that. Budget 2007 specifically sets out additional funding, more commitment by the Government of Canada and long term assistance for farmers. We will get that funding to the farm gate because that is where it needs to go.

• (1555)

In conclusion, Canada's new government is on the right track in positioning Canada for a tremendously bright future.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, people back home do not realize that when members serve on committees, they get to know each other and respect their contributions. I enjoy working with my colleague on the finance committee. He works very hard and he has done a good job.

We both come at things perhaps from a different point of view. I know my colleague has been a successful businessman since he was quite young. It seems to me that perhaps his view is shaped that everybody has the same opportunity as he had to be successful. Not all Canadians have that opportunity.

In my view, one of the flaws of the government is that it does not work hard enough at providing equality of access.

I want to ask my colleague about post-secondary education. Over the last number of years, the former Liberal government invested some \$13 billion in research and innovation since it balanced the books. Budget 2006 put a paltry \$200 million over two years into research, which includes foundations like CIHR, CFI as well as the granting agencies NSERC and SSHRC. This has them very concerned.

We cannot turn the tap off on research and expect to keep the researchers, who have come here over the last number of years, in Canada. The recommendation in the finance report specifically mentioned \$350 million for CIHR. Could I hear my colleague's views on whether he supports this specific recommendation?

With respect to post-secondary education access, thousands of Canadians simply cannot afford to go to colleges or universities and tax breaks do not make any difference to them. Eighty dollars for books is entirely immaterial to those people. Last year we put billions of dollars into direct support for the lowest income Canadians, for persons with disabilities and for aboriginal Canadians. Does my colleague believe the Government of Canada has a direct role to play, through things like the millennium scholarship, in assisting the lowest income Canadians go to university?

I also wish him a Merry Christmas.

• (1600)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his hard work on committee as well.

No doubt access is a big problem for some low income Canadians. In budget 2006 we made student loans much more available to students as a whole. The post-secondary institutions in my riding and the one in the member's riding overall benefited tremendously from

the \$1 billion that we put into infrastructure for post-secondary institutions in Canada. I know there is an infrastructure deficit and we have to continue along this course. As a result of that money, the universities did not have to charge students for tuition because the government gave them the money to help them maintain their schools. The \$1 billion will help tremendously.

I do support investment in research. I think my colleague will see that budget 2007 will specifically target money for research.

As the member knows, I have a lot of understanding with respect to the challenges that students face. I had a fairly significant student debt myself from university. My mother was the financial aid officer at Trent University in Peterborough for more than a decade. I am well aware of the challenges students face. I also think students have a responsibility, to some extent, to pay for their education. We just need to find the right balance. We have to ensure that every student who wants to go to university or college or seek post-secondary education has the ability to do so, regardless of income.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from Peterborough for his work in committee.

I would like to ask him a question about the fiscal imbalance, because that was the big promise made to voters in Quebec during the last election. Unfortunately, the indicators we are receiving are very disappointing. Throughout the entire lengthy report prepared in committee, only one recommendation has to do with the fiscal imbalance and it is, well, very vague. I will read it for everyone to hear.

That the federal government meet with the provincial/territorial governments with a view to assessing their relative fiscal capacity and the extent to which they are able to fulfill their constitutional responsibilities.

This is not at all the same promise made to Quebecers during the last election. That promise was to correct the fiscal imbalance, not merely to assess or react. As we all know, \$3.9 billion is needed to correct the fiscal imbalance. Quebec minister Mr. Audet emphasized this figure at the National Assembly. In fact, that is not how he worded it. He said that he wants the equalization payments to be based on the 10-province standard and that natural resources must be included in the calculation, for a total of \$2.8 billion.

He also called for the reinstatement of education funding, which totals \$1.1 billion. It seems to me that this adds up to a grand total of \$3.9 billion for the fiscal imbalance, and the other parties present in committee—Conservative, Liberal and NDP—could have made a commitment. No one saw the need to make a stronger recommendation concerning the fiscal imbalance.

Will my hon. colleague admit that this is grossly insufficient and much less than what was promised to Quebecers?

Government Orders

•(1605)

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Mr. Speaker, I know that this is an issue the member is quite passionate about. He should be quite heartened to know that our government is taking action on moving toward fiscal balance.

In fact, we spoke about it. We did not just speak about it in the last election campaign. That was not just a promise that we made then. We reiterated that promise in budget 2006. We have again spoken about it in “Advantage Canada” and the importance of moving toward fiscal balance for our overall competitiveness and benefiting all Canadians.

I know that the finance minister is meeting next week with provincial representatives. They are going to be talking about equalization. They are going to be talking about fiscal balance.

There is no easy solution to these problems because all of the provinces have a different view. Ultimately, it is going to be up to the finance minister and the government to do what is right for all Canadians. They have made a commitment that no province will be worse off after we work through and come up with a new funding formula for equalization. I think all Canadians and all provinces should be very heartened by that.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, about half of Canadians are saying today that they are just a paycheque or two away from living in poverty. This is at a time when large corporations, especially the big banks and the oil and gas industry, are recording record profits.

I have a question for the hon. member. If his focus is on tax cuts, how will that address the pressing need of Canadians for services and jobs that they need in order to pull themselves out of poverty? Because across-the-board tax cuts, no strings attached, for corporations does not create one job and provides no security that there will be greater investment in Canada. I would like to know how he intends to address the growing gap in Canada between the rich and the poor that certainly tax cuts do not address.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Mr. Speaker, first of all, it is important that we recognize that corporations must make a profit in Canada. If overall they do not make a profit in Canada, they will not be in Canada and we will not have employment in Canada. We have to have a very balanced approach when we talk about corporate income.

The important thing to stress is that by reducing taxes we do not just increase household income. We increase the incentive to work. Quite frankly, I know a lot of people that are not wealthy. I am in fact related to a lot of people that are not that wealthy and they tell me that they are a couple of paycheques away from bankruptcy at any given time.

What they tell me is that the way the system works right now works against them. If they take on extra hours, they pay it all out in taxes. It does not come back to them. The government is saying that if people are going to work hard, then they should be rewarded for working hard.

At the same time, we have to look out for those that are less fortunate in our community. We are addressing that by completely removing 655,000 Canadians from the tax rolls, by pension splitting for seniors, increasing the age credit for seniors, and doubling the pension allowance for seniors.

These types of measures are specifically increasing the amount of money that all Canadians can keep in their pockets. Ultimately, that is how we are going to help low income Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since this is probably the last time I will address this House before the holiday season, I would like to take this opportunity to wish all my hon. colleagues and everyone in my riding happy holidays. I hope they will have a safe and happy festive season.

I would also like to thank all the staff of the Standing Committee on Finance, who did an outstanding job so that we could release this report, about which the Bloc Québécois has serious reservations. But that is the fault of the elected representatives, not the staff who assisted us throughout our work, both in Ottawa and during our trips to western and eastern Canada. I want to make special mention of their contribution.

In this report, the Bloc Québécois nevertheless made some interesting gains. Personally, I am pleased with one measure in particular, a recommendation concerning train noise, because this is a huge concern in my riding.

People who live near railways are increasingly bothered by noise. This is especially true in Pointe-Saint-Charles, where there are people who did not build their homes near railways, but were already living in the area when the railways were built. For years, even decades, the residents and the railways coexisted relatively happily. But in recent years, with changes in the way the railway industry operates, the situation has become increasingly difficult for these people. I therefore tried to see how these people's lives could be improved, with the help of my colleague who sits on the Standing Committee on Transport. He worked to win adoption of amendments to the bill that is currently being studied, and some important gains have been made. On behalf of the people of Jeanne-Le Ber, I would like to thank him for the good work he did.

For my part, I suggested to the Standing Committee on Finance that the government provide a tax incentive to railway companies that purchase quieter machinery and equipment and thus reduce the annoyance factor. This incentive could consist of accelerated depreciation in order to truly encourage the companies to replace their equipment and cause less harm in our communities. The committee supported this measure and I am pleased to see it among the recommendations.

Among the other recommendations included in the report, I am pleased to note the proposal to review the drastic cuts—we must call a spade a spade—announced by the Conservatives a little earlier in this session. These cuts often affect the less fortunate in our society, individuals who are the most disadvantaged, for example, people with literacy problems, women living in difficult situations and students. They are all victims of these cuts.

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Some of the recommendations in this report ask us to take a step back and use some common sense. I am rather pleased that, this time, the NDP also agreed. I thought it was unfortunate that in this chamber, earlier in the session, they said they were in favour of cuts and against the motion denouncing the cuts. I think that things have returned somewhat to normal.

I found some good things in the report. However, we should look at what is missing. What is really missing is the follow-up to the motion recognizing the Quebec nation, adopted by a crushing majority in this chamber. None of the other three parties that supported this motion deemed it necessary to go beyond the mere symbolic gesture and the simple motion and to begin creating a tangible expression of that reality, recognizing that Quebecers form a nation.

•(1610)

In its actual wording, this report does not recognize that Quebecers are a nation because it still talks about national programs, national issues and never considers that if there are two or more nations in this country, then terms other than “national” need to be used to denote several nations.

One could argue that these are just words, nothing more than a speech, but it is more than that. In practice, this report is peppered with instances of interference in the jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces. Despite the motion that was passed in this House, we are still getting the same attitude from the federal government, which wants to set more federal standards and have more programs, criteria and controls when it does not have the constitutional authority to do so. It is unfortunate to see that, for now, this motion seems to be nothing but lip service.

Finally, this report does not recognize the Quebec nation because it does not want to recognize that a nation has to be able to make its own budgetary choices to allow it to develop as it sees fit. Clearly, the only real way for Quebecers to be able to make their own budgetary choices, now that they are recognized as a nation, will be to take the logical next step of making Quebec a country. Then we could make our own budgetary choices.

In my presentation today, I would like to give a few examples of what making our own budgetary choices as a nation would entail.

First, the Bloc Québécois has long been fighting for the implementation of the Kyoto protocol. As far as the environment is concerned, everyone—serious people, I mean—agrees it is urgent to take action to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. It is no longer an issue of wondering whether we will be able to achieve our targets; we have to succeed. We have a moral obligation to the youth of today and the generations to come to prevent this tragedy. Not to succeed would be an awful failure.

The performance of the previous Liberal government in this area was pitiful. In the 13 years they were in power, greenhouse gas emissions went through the roof. No control was done. Except for a few programs, they essentially did not have any real determination.

This is not an excuse for the new government to do nothing. It is unacceptable to say that we will not meet our targets because we are not able to. This is nothing but an admission of incompetence. In other words, the only difference between the Liberals and the

Conservatives is that the Conservatives know that they are incompetent when it comes to the environment. But in the end, nothing is happening in either case.

We are talking about the environment, but there is more than that. For Quebec in particular, the whole issue of the Kyoto protocol is vitally important to the economy. Emission credit mechanisms exist and would benefit Quebec. For example, if it were a country—or at least, if Canada wanted to implement the Kyoto protocol properly and comply with the territorial approach—Quebec could meet and even exceed its targets and then issue emission credits. Quebec could sell these credits to other countries, other governments, and add to its coffers while improving our environment. This would be fantastic.

For months, there has been talk of a carbon exchange in Montreal. The government has been asked about this. We are losing an economic institution that could do wonderful things for development in Quebec: the carbon exchange in Montreal. But the government is doing nothing about it.

Yet when it is time to dole out gifts to oil companies for the Alberta tar sands, there is no problem, the government goes right ahead.

In the end, companies in Quebec are losing out on thousands of promising business opportunities in the environmental field that could grow and stimulate our economy if we complied with the Kyoto protocol.

•(1615)

Finally, a sovereign Quebec could very easily enjoy benefits based on the environmental sector similar to those currently enjoyed by Alberta based on the oil sands. However, the decisions made in this House by the federalist parties go against the best interests of Quebec.

We saw this clearly with the \$320 million requested by Quebec for its plan. The government never wanted to give Quebec this money for its plan. Even worse, we saw the government refuse Quebec the right to speak for 45 seconds at the Kyoto protocol discussions in Kenya. And 45 seconds is not a long time. Personally, I hold the provincial Liberal government in Quebec somewhat responsible for getting on its knees, if not on prostrating itself entirely, to beg for just 45 seconds for Quebec to voice its opinion on the world stage. Even 45 seconds is too long for the government. It is too long for the federalist parties who do not want to recognize that Quebecers really do form a nation and that they should actually be treated differently.

If Quebec had been a sovereign country, it would not have had to fight for 45 seconds. It would have the entire week to advance its files, to demonstrate its achievements and display its successes in this area.

That is the advantage of sovereignty: making one's own budgetary choices. I have never blamed Canadians for making their own budgetary choices. The problem is that we are not talking about the same nation. I think the best solution, when we face conflicting budgetary choices, would be for each nation to make its own decisions. We can work together on files on which we agree, but each nation could develop its respective strengths without harming the other.

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Child care is another example of budgetary choices that elude Quebec. Quebeckers decided to create a program for themselves. They worked hard and had to pay, through taxes, for public child care. The program has been commended by many organizations for its high quality. An agreement had been reached with the previous government to give Quebec \$800 million to fund its system. That agreement was cancelled by the Conservatives.

That is what happens every time the government changes. Depending on the mood of the times, money is given to or taken away from Quebec and the provinces. The cancellation of the agreement demonstrates two things. First, contrary to what the member for Peterborough was saying earlier, the fiscal imbalance is not about to be fixed. The imbalance has grown by another \$800 million with this measure. Second, in order for the resolution of the fiscal imbalance to be acceptable in the medium term to the Bloc Québécois, we cannot just have money this year without knowing what will happen the next year. We will not fall into the trap of having to fight this battle for all time. The fiscal imbalance must be corrected by means of a tax transfer. That goes without saying and is proven by the fact that without a tax transfer the Government of Quebec will not be able to make long-term plans because the federal government could change the rules whenever it wants to.

Naturally, when Quebeckers have their own country, this will no longer be a problem. There will no longer be an imbalance. We will have full control over our revenue and we will do what we want with it.

There are other examples of programs that in the end survived, but only after huge battles. I am thinking of the parental leave program. At the time, the federal government refused to give money to Quebec to establish its own, more generous, parental leave program in line with what Quebeckers wanted.

• (1620)

In Quebec, everyone was in agreement. The parental leave proposal met with unanimous approval. Some 10 years of negotiations were needed for us to receive a portion of our taxes in order to make our own budgetary choices, which, for all intents and purposes, are social choices.

When a nation agrees almost unanimously on something and has to wait an entire decade to get its own money, money from its taxes, it is doomed to progress slowly, to say the least, and even stagnate, if not go backward. Is this truly what Quebeckers want? Of course not. Quebeckers are increasingly saying that we must not ask for permission for years on end to make our social choices. Sovereignty will allow us to make our own choices.

Another example is the aerospace policy. The aerospace industry is highly developed in Quebec. We have been asking the government for years for an aerospace policy. There is still absolutely nothing being done about it. And yet, in other sectors, such as the automobile industry, which is very developed in Ontario, a whole host of measures are in place. That is important for the Canadian nation. However, for the Quebec nation, where we need interventions in aerospace, there is nothing.

Earlier I talked about the oil industry, where a policy is firmly in place. The industry gets tax breaks and full accelerated depreciation

annually, as though investment in the tar sands is a one year event and could not, for all intents and purposes, be repeated 12 months later. Clearly, this does not hold water.

We also saw the example of Quebec City's Boîte à science science centre. The Bloc Québécois pushed very hard to move this project forward. We proposed it in committee, but it was rejected out of hand. This illustrates the inability of the Conservative members from Quebec to advance Quebec issues. It was the same story with the Liberals when they were in power. This is due to the simple fact that the elected members of the Quebec nation do not have a majority in this House. It is simply a question of mathematics. It is not out of spite or anything else, but our priorities are not respected.

When Quebec is a sovereign nation, it will be able to fund not only this science centre project in Quebec City, but the entire research and development sector. At present, federal research centres are concentrated in Ontario, in Ottawa. Quebec gets next to nothing. This is unfortunate, because investments in research and development are highly structural. Once we are a sovereign country, we will be able to develop and create numerous research centres in Quebec City, our national capital, to further our economy.

I would like to conclude by coming back to the issue of the fiscal imbalance. As I said earlier today in this House, \$3.9 billion must be paid to Quebec in the short term to address this imbalance. The government also must find a way of making tax transfers in the medium term, in order to truly correct the fiscal imbalance. In our opinion, this is the first step toward sovereignty. We will have to show Quebeckers everything we can accomplish when we take control of our taxes and make our own budget choices. Picture the day when, as a nation, we have control over 100% of our revenue and all our budget choices. Then, that nation will be better able to flourish and develop and will be more prosperous, in friendship and in cooperation with Canada.

• (1625)

[English]

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently while the hon. member was discussing budgetary issues and issues surrounding what he perceives to be an imbalance in the way Canada treats the provinces and in particular the province of Quebec. I would like to bring to the member's attention that the last budget reduced taxes for all Canadians. It is one of the greatest tax reducing budgets that ever occurred in this country, at least out of the past five or six budgets that were introduced by the previous government.

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Further, he mentioned there were still no breaks. I bring to the hon. member's attention that just in the last few days, probably the last few hours, the Minister of Industry announced more than \$350 million going to Pratt & Whitney, which is primarily concentrated in the member's province, with regard to modernization and replacing gas turbine engines. We know we need to become more efficient and be on the leading edge of that industry. When he speaks to his constituency, I think he owes it to them to provide the facts and not distort them.

In addition, not that very long ago, at the beginning of this month, the government introduced tariffs for Canadian apparel manufacturers. Canada's new government understands the importance of the apparel industry and knows much of it is concentrated in the hon. member's province. It is sensitive to that and that is why it introduced an additional \$4.5 million in tariff relief to help the Canadian apparel manufacturers be more competitive internationally. It consulted with the industry and that is the difference between the current government and the previous one. I wonder if the hon. member was cognizant of those recent developments in our relationship with his province and his constituency.

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Mr. Speaker, basically, the purpose of my speech was to show that the Quebec nation must be able to make its own budget choices, which it cannot do within the existing federal structure. This is not a competition about who got what handout to please one region of the country or another.

My colleague talked about equality among the provinces. That is not the issue. It is to be expected that members of a nation support one another. It does not make sense that the Quebec nation—which relies on its own Parliament, its own National Assembly in Quebec City—cannot make all of its own budget decisions or, at any rate, cannot make more decisions than it does now.

On the contrary, for many years, we have seen the opposite from all parties, Liberal, NDP and Conservative: an inexorable movement to centralize Canada. We have reached a point where we are asking ourselves what we need to do, as a nation, to move forward.

We must do more than vote in the House to recognize that Quebecers form a nation. We must give them the means to make their own budget decisions. It does not look like that can happen in Canada.

I am not criticizing Canadians for making their own budget choices and their own decisions. A very interesting example came up: the government is giving parents a childcare allowance even though the Government of Quebec's priority request was to maintain the \$800 compensation for the daycare program. That is a very good example of how the government does exactly the opposite of what we want. We do not want the federal government, whether it is Conservative or Liberal, to tell us about how good it is and all of the great stuff it is giving us. We want to make our own choices and we want them to be respected. It is as simple as that.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to wish the people of Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel happy holidays. I know that if my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé had the chance, he would

extend the same wish to his constituents. As the Bloc Québécois transport critic, I would also like to recommend that the people of Quebec and Canada drink responsibly and call Operation Red Nose where the service is available.

My question for my colleague from Jeanne-Le Ber, who did excellent work, concerns railways. I received many requests from him, because I had the opportunity to introduce and shepherd the amendments made by the Bloc Québécois to Bill C-11 on noise pollution.

I am very proud of the requests I received from the member for Jeanne-Le Ber. I can tell him that we will now talk about the least possible noise from vibrations. He had asked me to suggest “vibrations and fumes”, but the Conservatives did not want to accept anything but “vibrations”.

The Canadian Transportation Agency will now be able to address complaints of noise and vibrations. One of the member's urgent requests concerned the inconvenience to homeowners living near railroad tracks. This will be covered in the legislation, and if homeowners living near railroad tracks are inconvenienced, the Canadian Transportation Agency will be able to look into these cases and make comments.

My question about this ways and means motion concerns railways, which need some relief. I know that they called for accelerated depreciation. I will therefore ask my colleague to explain how accelerated depreciation will benefit railways.

• (1635)

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel for all his work on the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. This is a concrete example of what the Bloc Québécois can do for the citizens of Quebec. This gave more teeth to the Canada Transportation Act, to ensure that it would have real power to force railway companies to make the mandatory changes, if they do not do so voluntarily.

There is, of course, a regulatory aspect, but the Bloc Québécois did not stop there. We saw that the railway companies wanted to do their part to change their equipment, but, obviously, this often requires considerable investments. We wanted to recognize this reality. We therefore proposed accelerated capital depreciation allowances for rail equipment that helps decrease the noise and disturbances associated with railway operations. This proposal was accepted by the committee and is now part of the recommendations.

What is an accelerated capital depreciation allowance? This means that railway companies, if the measure is accepted by the minister—as we hope it will be—could deduct from their taxes, more quickly than they could have otherwise, any spending they do in this area. It is a way of encouraging them. This would allow them to make the changes faster, for example, and would shorten the timeframe required to make such changes.

It is an example of the committee's work on regulatory constraints by giving more teeth to the Canada Transportation Act, while encouraging and supporting, through taxation, companies that want to improve their performance in terms of noise.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): We have enough time for one more question and a very brief answer.

[English]

The hon. member for Peterborough.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the hon. member about a very specific recommendation. I did not hear him refer to it in his speech, but I believe it is something that he is also very passionate about. It is recommendation No. 35 which speaks to the elimination of tax havens in an effort to ensure that all corporations, businesses and individuals pay their fair share of taxes. Perhaps he might comment on why it was important that we put that in and why it was important for the finance minister to act on that recommendation.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Mr. Speaker, I think the best part of my colleague's comment was the last thing he said. He asked why it is important that the finance minister act on that recommendation. Indeed, the minister must act on it. Honestly, the Conservatives have been here for almost a year. For 13 years, the Liberals did nothing on this. We even saw the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard, when he was finance minister, amend the Canadian tax conventions and laws to benefit shipping companies. This has to stop. Taxpayers, who for the most part are very honest, are doing everything they can. Everyone must contribute and do their share.

[English]

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to talk about the work of the finance committee over the last number of months. Before I begin I would like to wish everybody here in the House and those who are watching at home and those in my riding a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Most of my speech today will reflect on the process of what we were able to accomplish and how it worked. As somebody who is new to Parliament, who was elected on January 23, the process of dealing with budgets and how it works was something that was new to me. I would like to relate it a little bit to how it worked with the budgets I worked on for 13 years at the municipal level.

I want to talk a little about my own process in terms of budget input and how we were able to determine what was important to Burlington and talk a little about the recommendations that we have, how the report works and where it goes from here.

First of all, I want to thank all committee members for their involvement, whether they are Conservative, Liberal, Bloc or New Democrat. I think we worked well together. Obviously, we have different views on particular issues, but overall as a committee we worked very well together and worked very closely as we travelled across the country to see what Canadians felt should be in the budget for 2007.

I want to remind everybody that this is advice that the committee is giving to the finance minister. The finance minister will look at the advice in detail, run the numbers on certain issues, come back with answers, and build what he thinks is appropriate into the next budget, which we expect in the spring of 2007.

Going across the country was important to the process. I had the opportunity to go all across the country. We were in Vancouver, Yellowknife, Fort McMurray, Saskatoon, St. John's, Quebec City, Toronto and Halifax. We were hosted by one of our members of the committee who is from the Halifax area and did a fine job of hosting us in Halifax. There were also people who came to see us here in Ottawa.

Here is the way it worked because it is important that people understand it. We had panels. In the morning and in the afternoon, we had 6, 8, or 10 people come and talk to us, each given about five minutes to make their presentations. Then it went around, as all committees do, and we asked questions on the specific topics that they had.

In this case, the topics were not all related, so we could have people on different topics sitting beside each other, each giving their five minutes, giving us broad perspectives of what the needs were across the country. It is fair to say, at least in my opinion, that there are a variety of needs and desires across this country, and it is a process that is important. I am not sure it was done in the past, but I think it is the right thing to be doing to understand what the particular issues are for all areas.

The one thing I would comment on is that we did not randomly pick people to come out. Most people represented their organizations and particular interests, so they were very focused on what they wanted. They understood and they only had five minutes.

If there is one thing I would like to comment on in terms of the meetings system that we have, I actually do not mind having a variety of opinions on different topics. It makes for a much more interesting meeting and allows for a lot better questioning in my opinion, but we did see a lot of repetition. We saw people from different organizations, from different parts of the country, basically giving us the same message, and unfortunately, they only had five minutes.

I think the committee, when it does this again next year, if it does it again next year, should consider that if people are applying for these positions from across the country, if their organization is nationwide and they are seeing us in other spots, that they make a decision as to where it is most effective for them and that we allow more time for their presentations because five minutes is not a lot of time.

● (1640)

The witnesses only have time to highlight a few things that are of interest to them. However, for me personally, and it may not be the same for all committee members, but if the witnesses had more time to elaborate on their particular interests it would make for a better consultation process.

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I thank the research staff and the clerks who helped organize those events. It is difficult. We basically move a House committee from one city to the next and it happens overnight. They did an absolutely fabulous job of ensuring we were all prepared, that we knew who was coming to see us and that we had the research material and the presentations in front of us. That is a lot of work and not an easy task. I know people may think that the committee is on a bit of a junket when it goes across the country but it is actually work from eight in the morning until five at night. We jump on a plane, fly to the next place, go to a hotel room and we are back at it again at 9 o'clock. The room looks almost the same as it did the day before.

Our analysts in this case were taking in all the information that was provided by those who presented to us and listened to all the questions that came from the different sides of the table. They looked at it and recorded it and provided a really good report for us to review once we were all finished with our consultation process. Their report was very thick and it had lots of information in it. We did not necessarily agree with everything but we at least agreed with some of the things.

If I were to make a suggestion, it would be that I would be interested in seeing that in the future, although I am not sure it will work, we narrow the topics to the areas that we actually agree on and that we would like to submit to the finance department for its consideration but not necessarily implementation. As we did this time, which I appreciate, we would then offer each party an opportunity to put in a supplementary report. In fact, the New Democrats and the Conservatives put in what we called the supplementary opinion. Our other friends put in a minority opinion. Based on the history of this place and how things work, they are called minority reports.

However, for the budget consultation, I think it would be more effective and more realistic if we were to say that this is the four, five, ten, or whatever that number is, things that we all agree on that we want to recommend. We could also, as a group, present the supplementary ideas that we heard. It should not be as partisan as it has been and I believe this would be one way of showing Canadians that we are willing to work together as a minority. Whether it is a minority or a majority government, this is the way to do it.

Canadians do send us here to get things done and this is one of my personal opinions on how things could be improved.

Personally, the budget has always been important to me. As a city councillor, I was known for my tenacity, both at the region of Halton and the city of Burlington, for going over the budget with a fine tooth comb, making suggestions and making changes. Not all of them passed because they could not get acceptance by everybody. I expect the exact same thing here. We are doing it more as a group, though, instead of individually.

As I need some input from my public, I held a public meeting in my riding about a month and a half ago on the budget and asked people what they wanted to see in the budget. About 80 people attended the meeting, which I thought was pretty good for a Thursday evening, and the meeting lasted almost three hours. We taped it so we would know what was said.

Another thing that is important for the public to know is how the process works. They should know that it is not picked out of a tree or that low lying fruit is picked and that is what goes in the budget. A process is in place and we do work at it. I have put together a show, which is on my local cable company, that talks about how the budget process is done and it is airing right now.

My constituents still have the opportunity to let me know what they would like to see in the budget. The budget, obviously, has not been set and there is still a number of months for that to happen. It is important for all of us to consult with our constituents on these things and we pick our own way to do it.

● (1645)

At the end of the day, we had 43 recommendations on which, let us be frank, we did not all agree. As it is a minority Parliament, votes were held on each recommendation. Some were accepted and some were not. Near the end of my presentation I will talk about a few that I supported as an individual member of Parliament. I believe on my side the Conservative caucus also supported some. We have 43 recommendations.

The report has been broken down into a number of areas to make it easier for Canadians to understand what we are talking about. The theme this year, which I think is important, is how can we be more competitive in this world market.

I think that anyone who says that we are not working in a competitive world is relatively naive and is playing politics with the issue. No matter which company in my riding that I talk to, the vast majority are competing against other competitors from around the world, not just from around the block.

We need a government that thinks about the economy in a world perspective, that we are competing as companies with worldwide companies. We are competing as individuals. We are competing for talent. I know it has been discussed about where we are going with talent and people. The mobility of labour has increased exponentially over the last number of years and we are working on that.

We also talk about health care and the health of our people, which is all part of our budget.

Another section of our budget is life learning. I think is important to have recommendations that say that learning is not only done in elementary schools, which, as we know, constitutionally is not part of what the federal government is responsible for.

We are looking at research and at how to assist students at post-secondary education levels. There are a number of recommendations in that area.

As we saw this week, and which was reported in the newspaper, the actual net worth of people has gone up, but so also has their net debt in a sense. The individual debt of Canadians has gone up. We need to work on issues that help give people the incentives to invest money and to save for the future. We have done that through a number of recommendations in this budget.

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It is also important that we have full employment or as close to full employment as possible in this country. We are doing very well. The economy is doing well. In my particular area, the employment rate is not terribly high but we do have unemployed people and we need to give them incentives to find work and help them find that work. This budget recommendation also provides those types of incentives.

We need to look at communities because they are important to all of us. We do not all live in a bubble. I am beside Toronto, Oakville and Hamilton. We need to ensure that the infrastructure is in place to make those communities competitive so that they can compete, not just with each other necessarily but with other communities around the world, and we must ensure they are healthy places for people to live.

Infrastructure is very important and the budget has a number of recommendations on infrastructure. While I was travelling across the country I found that the infrastructure needs in my riding were completely different in some areas than in others. However, I think infrastructure should be focused.

We heard the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, in which I used to play an active part as a member of municipal council. FCM has moved a little bit, saying that it wants long term funding for long term planning. We supported its infrastructure funding through the gas tax and we will continue to do so. In terms of its present commitment, it will run out in early 2010 or 2012. I cannot remember the date off the top of my head but it will be in the next number of years. It is looking for a longer term and we discussed that.

The interesting thing about that is that the FCM wanted to add what we used to call soft services. It wanted arenas and those types of things, which was news to me. This was something I needed to discuss and debate with those people, which was why it was important to be on that trip. I needed to understand those differences.

We do have money set aside for environmental initiatives, which are important and they are included in those 45 recommendations.

• (1650)

We also have a section in this report on charitable giving and the voluntary sector. I have done more than my share of volunteering over a number of years. I could give a long list of boards of associations that I have been on and have helped with. I have knocked on doors to raise money for a number of organizations within my riding, as we all have. We looked at a number of recommendations and I have a recommendation that I will highlight in a few minutes that talks about this section.

There is also a section on arts and culture. I too have been active in this area in my riding. I have been very much a leader in terms of promoting a performing arts centre for the city of Burlington, a piece of infrastructure that the city does not have. I hope we will be able to deliver it in the near future. I am part of a fundraising project right now. Other leaders have come forward and are leading on this project on a local front. I am doing what I can from here to make it happen.

Corporate taxation was mentioned in an earlier question. There is a section in this report on how we can improve corporate taxation,

which I think needs to be improved. We have to remember the theme of this prebudget consultation which was how to be competitive and how our businesses could compete against others. We heard in a lot of presentations that we need to be more competitive in the corporate area.

We heard a lot about innovation, research and entrepreneurship. I have a number of post-secondary education institutions in my area, none particularly in Burlington yet, but we have a sign up that McMaster is hopefully moving to Burlington. We have a location for at least one of its schools.

There are a number of other spending issues. We talked about the surplus and the fiscal imbalance, both of which are included in this presentation to the finance minister. It is important that people understand that we are not ignoring these issues. The finance minister knows where we stand. I am certainly supportive of a plan for any existing surplus.

Surplus is really overtaxation. I have never been a fan of overtaxation and I do not think most Canadians are fans. I understand from my previous experience that we need a bit of a cushion just in case things get out of whack from an economic point of view on occasion, but that does not mean that we have to overtax. Fiscal balance is a part of this presentation. It was part of our discussion. Members know that we are working on these issues.

There were some local issues that were of interest to members. I appreciate all the different parties putting together what they were interested in. I do not necessarily agree with everything, but I do appreciate their efforts.

There are 43 recommendations in this report to the minister. There are a couple that I would like to highlight and I am going to speak to the ones that I think the majority of us agreed with.

One of my favourites that I want to talk about is the arts. I am not sure if we all agreed on recommendation No. 22, but I certainly did. Arts and culture is important to the government and the finance committee. We recommended a funding increase to the Canada Council for the Arts. It is important to note that the government in its 2006 budget increased money for the arts. We increased funding to \$30 million this year and another \$50 million next year.

The arts council came to committee a couple of times. I think it could have had more time at one event instead of at a number of events. The arts council wants to get \$300 million over a number of years. There was a debate on how many years that would be and I probably lost the debate at committee. The report says over two years. I am not sure we can make it that quickly. It is important that these kinds of things are highlighted.

• (1655)

Another recommendation relates to my work with charities. There is a recommendation that publicly listed securities for private foundations be considered for the same tax holiday that the government provided in 2006 so that people can donate securities to a charity.

Government Orders

I want people to read the recommendations and understand what we have provided. I am sure that we will see some of them in the next budget. I look forward to that debate. My final comment is that if a lot of the things we had discussions on actually—

• (1700)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I regret that the hon. member could not get his final comment in, but I have to keep the debate moving.

The hon. member for Yukon.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a few comments.

First, the member talked about research. As was mentioned in question period today, the government has made substantial cuts to research so I wonder what his thoughts are on that.

Second, as he knows, one of the recommendations was to restore the cuts in a number of areas, including literacy. I was at one committee hearing and this was loud and clear and took up most of the hearing. It was not partisan; it was the general public who talked about it. The public referenced all these cuts for vulnerable people.

Of course it did then show up as a recommendation in the report that all of the cuts to literacy, the court challenges program, volunteers, museums, and tourism be reinstated. I wonder if the member will be supporting that recommendation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Before the hon. member for Burlington responds to that question, the hon. government House leader is rising on a point of order.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if you seek it I think you would find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, on Wednesday, December 13, 2006 the House shall adjourn at the end of the time provided for government orders and, for the remainder of the day, the Chair shall not receive any quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent; when the House adjourns on Wednesday, December 13, 2006, it shall stand adjourned until Monday, January 29, 2007, provided that, for the purposes of Standing Order 28, it shall be deemed to have sat on Thursday, December 14, and Friday, December 15, 2006.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Does the hon. government House leader have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): 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)

[*English*]

PREBUDGET CONSULTATIONS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question and I also appreciate the fact that the member opposite joined us in committee when we were in his hometown.

First, research is important, and the report contains a number of recommendations on research. We heard recommendations from across the country. McMaster University representatives have come to see me a number of times about research. Representatives from a number of other area schools, such as the University of Toronto, have come to see me and have made presentations. I think research is covered in this presentation and I think the finance minister will take it under consideration when he prepares the next budget.

On the removal of cuts, I will not support going back to before those cuts. If people actually read the documentation that explains why those cuts were made, whether they were administrative cuts or cuts to programs that had money which was never applied for, they will see that there were good reasons for those cuts.

In addition, the Conservatives were elected because we said we were going to look after taxpayer dollars. I used to propose numerous cuts to city and regional budgets every year. I did not get them all, but I got some. I will continue to—

The Speaker: The hon. member will be able to answer another question in due course.

Before I go back to questions and comments, I wish to advise hon. members that in light of the motion just adopted there will be a reception for hon. members in room 216 following the adjournment of the House at 5:30 p.m.

[*Translation*]

All hon. members are invited to celebrate the end of the session.

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to wish everyone in my riding of Berthier—Maskinongé happy holidays.

I listened to my Conservative colleague and I have a question for him.

The government has a great deal of latitude in terms of the budget. In fact, the federal government has posted huge surpluses for several years. Recently, cuts were made to programs supporting the illiterate, women, minority language rights and rights pertaining to court challenges.

For some time, the Bloc Québécois has also been asking for an assistance program for older workers. We are quite simply asking the Canadian government for a measure that could be implemented across Canada. It would cost about \$70 million to help older workers just by altering the employment insurance plan. This government has slashed social programs in the last little while.

I would like to know why is the government attacking the most disadvantaged in our society when it has such a large surplus?

Government Orders

• (1705)

[English]

Mr. Mike Wallace: Mr. Speaker, that was an excellent question. Based on the reasoning of the hon. member, the government would never cut anything; the government would never look at a program and decide that it had done its job or it was not doing its job, and because the government had allocated money to it, that was it and it was going to exist forever.

This government does not operate that way. We look at all programs to make sure that they offer value for money and that they are delivering the services they are supposed to deliver. If they are not delivering the services they are supposed to deliver, then it is time that they be ended. I make no apologies for that.

I think the government, no matter which party is in government, should be looking at ways to make sure that taxpayer dollars are spent efficiently and effectively and that they are not wasted on programs that are not producing the results they are intended to produce. The programs may have good intentions when they are first developed, but if they are not coming through at the end, it is up to the politicians of the day to decide it is time to move on and develop new programs that will deliver the answer they are looking for.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it was a pleasure working with the hon. member on the government operations and estimates committee. We were sorry to lose him to another committee.

My question for him concerns rail service. The people of Canada own a passenger rail service which has worked hard to boost its ridership. It is an environmentally friendly form of transportation. It is the preferred form of transportation, and the only form of transportation for many Canadians, yet we have neglected our VIA Rail passenger service. We have neglected to invest the funds to renew the infrastructure and to maintain this form of transportation at a time when many other countries are heavily investing in passenger rail service as one of the preferred forms of transportation.

I would like to ask the hon. member whether his committee considered further investment in VIA Rail and what is he going to be recommending on this.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the kind words about working with her on the government operations committee, but I do not miss it.

I will be frank. I do not believe we got into absolute detail in terms of VIA Rail. I may have to check my notes on that. I will say that I was a passenger on VIA Rail a couple of weekends ago. I used it to go to Montreal and back. In terms of a mode of transportation, railway does play an important role in this country. I think it deserves, as part of the greater infrastructure money and review of what we need to do for infrastructure and for the environment, to play a role in the future budgets. I think it will play a role in future policy, both environmental and infrastructure, for this government.

The member mentioned VIA, but I also want to mention GO. In my riding of Burlington GO train and VIA Rail play a very important role. A track is actually added as we speak to provide more rail service to my riding and my community. I am very supportive of that. I have actually been working with them. I had a

meeting with VIA Rail not that long ago to talk about noise issues and some other things that have been dealt with in a different bill.

To summarize, I think rail and all transportation needs to be looked at as to what is best for the environment, what is best for the communities and what is best for the infrastructure for people and for business to be viable in this country.

• (1710)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in his speech the member said that the existence of a surplus represents overtaxation. I wonder if the member could explain to the House how we pay down the national debt without having a surplus.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Mr. Speaker, I did not say that there should not be a surplus. I think if the member was listening carefully, I said that there should be a cushion and part of that cushion is a view. This government has through its advantage Canada plan identified that there is a net debt program that we would like to pursue.

There is a plan, the first time this country has ever had one, to pay down our net debt. It will require tax dollars to make that happen. It is part of our cost basis. In my experience as a municipal politician, we always had a surplus that we built in—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, flipping through the report and looking at the recommendations, it is a good report and is pretty comprehensive. I know a lot of work went into it by all the members of the finance committee.

One recommendation that is important to my riding is the one on mental health because there is a mental hospital in my riding. I want to see more investment into our mental health system. I would like him to comment on that and also on infrastructure needs in rural communities which seem to be at a bit of a disadvantage compared to larger urban centres. I want to hear from him on that and how important it is to the overall economic growth and prosperity for all Canadians.

This probably being the last time I am going to be up, I want to wish everyone a merry Christmas.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Mr. Speaker, first on the mental health issue, I absolutely agree with my fellow member. We had some great presentations on mental health. There is a recommendation to put a plan together for mental health which does not exist now and did not exist in the past. We are asking the finance minister to fund that to make it happen. We did have a report from the other house which talked about mental health, how it should be funded and a number of things.

On infrastructure, there are both rural and urban infrastructure needs and they need to be looked at in balance. This presentation talks about infrastructure and hopefully it will look at solving some of the rural and urban problems.

Government Orders

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the most distinguished member for Laval—Les Îles.

It is a pleasure for me to have the opportunity to speak to the prebudget recommendations and in fact what we hope to see in the next budget, budget 2007. I did have the opportunity to be a member of the finance committee. Along with colleagues from all the parties, we produced this report, which I think is very comprehensive and has many good recommendations in it.

I would like to echo what some of the other members of the committee have said, that we did work quite well together as we travelled across Canada. We went from Whitehorse to St. John's, and I was particularly pleased that when we were in my home community of Halifax, we had a little reception on board the HMCS *Sackville*, which is Canada's naval memorial and a fitting tribute to the many Canadians who have served this country so well. I know that all the members enjoyed that.

I would like to very quickly just preface my comments on some of the specific recommendations by saying that I think the actions of the government so far, particularly the billions of dollars worth of cuts to women's groups, student employment, seniors, minorities and the voluntary sector are wrong. I think they are wrong to most Canadians. Certainly, that is what we heard as we travelled the country. People were very concerned about what the government had done so far and I hope budget 2007, in particular, will provide the government a chance to show that vulnerable Canadians actually count in its plans.

I would like to take members through some of the recommendations that I think are particularly important. As we have heard, there were 43 recommendations.

The first one was on the whole issue of health promotion and wellness, which is something that is very important. It is one of the issues that brought me into politics. Coming from Atlantic Canada, we have a very high incidence of chronic disease. Diabetes is out of control along with cardiovascular diseases, arthritis and cancers. There is an issue here.

I will not read the whole recommendation, but it actually gets to having an impact on health promotion. It indicates that the government should continue to allocate funds for the national immunization strategy, which was an initiative that came out of our public health agency. When the member for St. Paul's was the minister of public health, this was one of her babies and she really did a great job on it, but it needs to be renewed. It is imperative that the government renew the strategy, so that all children in Canada get the immunizations they need.

Further to that, we have recommended that a dedicated fund be established of \$300 million over three years for future immunization programs. There are some very exciting new vaccines being developed. Merck Frosst has one for the human papillomavirus that can virtually eliminate cervical cancer. It is very important that we invest in these vaccines, in this case for Canadian girls and Canadian women, that will virtually eliminate cervical cancer.

One of my colleagues mentioned mental health. We have a recommendation here for the creation of a Canadian mental health

commission. I do not need to go into that a lot. Senator Kirby and his group from the Senate have put forward a very comprehensive proposal, which I hope the government follows up on, not only with vague commitments but with specific dollars attached.

Recommendation No. 6 is to amend the Income Tax Act to increase the value of the Canada child tax benefit. There is not a specific dollar associated with this, but a lot of anti-poverty groups, such as John Murphy from the National Council of Welfare and others, suggested \$4,900. The Canada child tax benefit was an initiative of the previous Liberal government that a lot of people give it credit for. There is way too much child poverty in Canada, but the child tax benefit is the kind of policy for which an enlightened government takes responsibility and says that it is going to do something for our kids to ensure that all kids have some access to the resources that they need as they grow up.

One of our most important recommendations was around student financing. Just over a year ago, the previous government introduced a very important update that included huge, sweeping investments in access for students, low income families and persons with disabilities. It recognized that the federal government does have a role to play. Specifically, we are recommending in this report that the Canada millennium scholarship foundation mandate be renewed. This again was an initiative of some years ago.

It needs new money. It needs an indication very soon that it will continue. It is imperative that we do that and also expand Canada access grants. These are grants that provide direct support for students who do not have the means to go to university. We are recommending that those grants be upgraded to all four years of an undergraduate education. That is very important.

The topic of our whole budget discussions was competitiveness and productivity. We cannot discuss competitiveness without putting the people in the picture. The people are the kids in Canada, the young people in Canada who absolutely need assistance in getting to university. Access is a huge priority for them and it should be for the Government of Canada.

● (1715)

Recommendation 9 is to reduce personal income taxes. That one speaks to itself. Rather than investing \$5.5 billion or \$6 billion in GST cuts, which disproportionately favour those who do not need the assistance, reduce personal income tax for the lowest income Canadians, raise the personal exemption and make a difference in the lives of Canadians.

Recommendation 12 is to reinstate the programs and funds that have been eliminated. These are the cuts to the Status of Women, the law commission, the court challenges, volunteerism and things like that.

Government Orders

Another recommendation, recommendation 13, is for SCPI, the supporting communities partnership initiative. This is very important to Canadians. No one came to our committee and said that was a good move. Lots of people came and said that it was dumb and it had to be fixed. A very important recommendation of our committee is reinstating those cuts.

Recommendation 21 is that the federal government study the feasibility of a tax measure that would recognize and reward the hours of volunteer activity. This is a complex recommendation and I understand that. There are some templates at which we can look. For example, Ron Colman and the GPI, which is the genuine progress index based in Atlantic Canada, looks at the quality of life not just in terms of dollars, but in terms of volunteerism activity and quality of life and environment. A truly enlightened society goes beyond just the economics. There is a holistic approach to life and we need to do that. Recognizing the huge value that volunteers provide is a good start in that direction. Cutting the volunteerism initiative is sending the wrong signal.

Recommendation 22 is to increase funds allocated to the arts and culture. We get so much from arts and culture. Every one of us in the House can look to the artists in their community. In my case we have new artists like Matt Mays. We have artists in Nova Scotia, in Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, people like Tom Forrestall. We also have dancers.

We cannot only look at a budget and say that all we will do is health and economic development. Arts and culture provide so much of what makes us unique as Canadians, makes us unique as Nova Scotians, makes us unique as Dartmouth—Cole Harbour residents as well.

Recommendation 25 is to amend the Excise Tax Act in order to ensure a full rebate on the GST paid by universities, colleges, school boards and hospitals. We heard quite a bit about that. It makes eminent sense that we do not want to be penalizing behaviour that leads to increased productivity for Canada.

A very important recommendation was on research. I have mentioned before that in the late 1990s Canada underwent a transformation in research and innovation. We were not the only ones in the world doing it, but we did it as well as anyone. It became kind of a template for success internationally. It put something in the order of \$13 billion into research and innovation.

We developed and created CIHR, the Canadian Institutes for Health Research out of the old MRC, Medical Research Council. We have put huge amounts of money into CIHR. That money leverages so much more. It has not only done basic biomedical and clinical research, but has looked at population health and health systems. How do we impact the health of aboriginal Canadians? How do we impact the health of Atlantic Canadians, of women, or groups within society? They have leveraged so much money. It is very important that we continue that.

CIHR has made a very strong case for increased funding of \$350 million, and that is in the report. Increasing the indirect costs of research is also in the report. For quite a while the research institutes in Canada have said they need 40% indirect costing. They now receive in the range of 25¢ on the dollar. Last year's economic update

proposed to go to 40%. That was cancelled by the new government when it took power. We need to follow through on that.

One item that was missed in our report was the very important issue of research done by health charities, the Heart and Stroke, Cancer Society, Diabetes Association. They also need indirect costs and the government has to find a way to ensure they are not penalized.

GrowthWorks Atlantic came to see us a number of times and indicated that the federal government should amend the Income Tax Act to increase to \$1,500 the labour sponsored funds tax credit. That is very important for venture capital.

International development is critical. At some point in time we have to do more than we are doing. Canada has been very supportive internationally of development work in continents such as Africa, Asia and Central America. We should commit to the 0.7%, the Pearson standard in international development.

While members of Parliament are preparing to go home to our ridings for a comfortable Christmas, and most Canadians are going to have a reasonable Christmas, half the world suffers in extreme poverty, with much disease. As a nation, we have to get our heads around the fact that we have a responsibility to the rest of the world. It is very important that we hit that 0.7%. The government should take some steps in that direction.

In conclusion, the most important advice that I ever got about politics was from my mother—

● (1720)

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry. I am very conscious of the fact that the member's colleague wants to get up.

Questions and comments, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member intently. I was surprised he did not mention our advantage, the new advantage the finance minister has given to the nation. To me, it is a very good statement and it looks ahead. All the things he has said show up in that and they will come in the future. We will be doing lots for our seniors and for those who live in poverty.

This year my daughter gets married on New Year's Eve. While she is making her wedding plans, I will be helping make plans with the government for her future. Right now I know she loves the working tax that will be implemented. I know she will like the child benefit in the future.

Government Orders

There are very many advantages to our plan. We are looking into the future. I also want to wish everyone a Merry Christmas, including those who oversee the chamber and are here with us so many times in the evening. To our pages and to everyone, Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Could the member opposite offer my daughter a better plan than we have offered?

• (1725)

Mr. Michael Savage: The brief answer, Mr. Speaker, is yes we can, but the longer answer is that governments make choices. It is not only about what the government is proposing to do in the future. It is chewing up dollars on things like the GST and providing \$1,200 to families, many of whom do not need that money like others do.

Let me go back to what my mother told me years ago. She said, "If you go into politics, you will do the right thing, because you have to understand, you go into public service to help those who need help and not those who do not". I do not know how long I will serve in this chamber, but I know that while I am here, this will be my cause.

In budget 2006, the gap between rich and poor was increased and that is unconscionable. Canadians have told the finance committee that it is wrong. It is not the Canadian way. I want to see in budget 2007, as do Canadians, a recognition that all Canadians deserve the attention of the government, and not just the well to do.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know that I have just a few minutes left before the fall session ends. Nevertheless, I have a few things to say to the party opposite.

I noticed a large number of recommendations in the report of the Standing Committee on Finance. They are all measures that members on this side of the House have identified as helping the most vulnerable people in our society, such as women and minority language communities. There are also recommendations about the Law Commission of Canada and the court challenges program.

These programs have helped people who did not have the financial means to help themselves or who did not know whom to turn to. These programs would have continued to help them.

I noticed that the vast majority of the recommendations in this report indicate that these programs should continue. Not only should they continue, but they should also receive considerable funding from our government.

I would like the government to tell me if the Minister of Finance really intends to listen to what his committee is asking him to do: reinstate the funds he cut from services for the most vulnerable members of our society. How could he cut these programs when everyone knows there is a \$13 billion surplus for 2005-06?

I just summarized what I would have liked to explain in detail with plenty of examples. Still, I would like to draw the attention of all of my colleagues in this House tonight to the fact that, of the elected representatives who are members of the Standing Committee on Finance, who belong to all parties in the House of Commons, a majority voted for the recommendations in this report. It is now up to the Minister of Finance to listen to those representatives. After all, they were elected by Canadians and they represent them.

I hope that the Minister of Finance will remember that as he prepares the report to be presented in next spring's budget.

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Before I proceed to the motion which I have in my hand, I want to wish the assembled through a Merry Christmas and Joyeux Noël. Happy holidays to all members and their families, and to the staff of the House who serve us so well: the pages, clerks at the table, the Sergeant-at-Arms, interpreters and everyone.

It now being 5:30 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today the House stands adjourned until Monday, January 29, 2007 at 11 a.m., pursuant to Standing Orders 28(2) and 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.)

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