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(HANSARD)

Wednesday, February 27, 2008

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, February 27, 2008

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

•(1400)

[English]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Dufferin—Caledon.

[Members sang the national anthem]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

SHAUGHNESSY COHEN AWARD FOR POLITICAL WRITING

Hon. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tonight in Ottawa, the Shaughnessy Cohen Award for Political Writing will be awarded, recognizing the best non-fiction book that enhances the understanding of a political subject of interest to Canadian readers.

The Writers' Trust of Canada's award commemorates the late Shaughnessy Cohen, former MP for Windsor—St. Clair. Prior to her death in 1998, she was known by all for her personality and contribution to this country.

This year's finalists for the award include: Clive Doucet for *Urban Meltdown: Cities, Climate Change and Politics as Usual*; Richard Gwyn for *John A.: The Man Who Made Us; The Life and Times of John A. Macdonald, Volume One: 1815-1867*; Andrea Mandel-Campbell for *Why Mexicans Don't Drink Molson*; David E. Smith for *The People's House of Commons: Theories of Democracy in Contention*; and Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang for *The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar*.

I ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating the finalists.

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CANADIAN FORCES

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my constituents of Don Valley East and the people of Canada, I would like to pay tribute to the courageous men and

women who are currently serving in the NATO led mission in Afghanistan.

Today, damaging earthquakes, limited freshwater resources, soil degradation, overgrazing, deforestation and a crumbling infrastructure all conspire to make civil reconstruction a daunting task in the midst of continuous attacks by the Taliban.

We must also pay homage to the families of our Canadian Forces who must endure long periods of time without their loved ones at home and somehow deal with the uncertainty that this mission presents.

I would like to tell our troops that the people of Canada are extremely proud of the work they are doing in Afghanistan.

Some day the guns will fall silent and war will give way to a new era of peace, and Canada's fallen heroes will never be forgotten for the sacrifice they made in the service of their country.

* * *

[Translation]

BERTIN SAVARD

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pay tribute to a great artist from my riding, Bertin Savard.

On January 23, Bertin Savard, an actor, author and director, won the competition “Profile d'entreprise 2008” put on by the Châteauguay chamber of commerce and industry. This award was in acknowledgement of his work as president of Théâtre Quatre/Corps, a company known for its exceptional cultural outreach.

In 2004, he was honoured for being the cultural leader who contributed most to the development of culture in the RCM of Roussillon, and in 2000 he was recognized for his work as a cultural volunteer in the city of Châteauguay.

I in turn would like to highlight the undeniable contribution of Bertin Savard to our region's cultural outreach. He is a great ambassador for our region, and an eloquent promoter of Quebec culture.

Statements by Members

●(1405)

[English]

THE BUDGET

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday's budget continues the Harper agenda that fails women. Women in Canada are falling further and further behind with each consecutive Conservative budget.

When will the government address the concerns of 52% of the population?

Ordinary women do not benefit from this new budget. Corporations will pay less for government services, while individual families will pick up the costs. Individuals will be required to pay more through personal income taxes, while corporations pay less.

These extra taxes are a burden that many families cannot afford, especially the 43% of single mothers who live below the poverty level.

The government should have invested in women but chose to ignore them. Where are the child care spaces? Where is the EI reform? Where is the proactive pay equity legislation? Where is the affordable housing? Where is the equality?

Women deserve better.

The Speaker: I caution the hon. member for London—Fanshawe. I think she mentioned a member's name in her remarks and she may want to be careful to avoid that in the future.

The hon. member for Nepean—Carleton.

* * *

WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a giant in the world of great ideas is lost. William F. Buckley, 82 years old, died today after a life consecrated to the defence of the ideals upon which our civilization is built and without which it would surely crumble.

The Yale educated Buckley founded the *National Review* magazine in 1955 and remained its editor for three decades.

George Herbert Walker Bush awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

President Reagan told Buckley:

You didn't just part the Red Sea—you rolled it back, dried it up, and left exposed, for all the world to see, the naked desert that is statism.

He exposed socialism as the oppressive ideology it is, and its ugly sibling, communism, as one of the most evil ideas to ever infect the earth.

A prominent Canadian author, Adam Daifallah, said that he popularized “smaller government, tax cuts and total victory over the Soviet Union”.

It is a great loss to us all.

ANDREW BERTIE

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on February 7, 2008, in the eternal city of Rome, the Grand Master of the Order of Malta, His Most Eminent Highness, Andrew Bertie, passed away.

The Order of Malta was formed over 900 years ago and is known the world over for its work of charity, as well as the commitment of its members to the promotion of spirituality and the cause of humanity.

His Eminence joined the Order of Malta in 1956 and was elected to the post of Grand Master in 1988. He was the first person from England to be elected to this post.

At his funeral on February 16, His Eminence, Pio Cardinal Laghi, spoke of the Grand Master's tireless humanitarian efforts, as well as his deep commitment to spiritual principles.

I am sure all members of Parliament join in expressing our condolences to the members of the Order of Malta on this sad occasion.

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THE BUDGET

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, budget 2008 demonstrates responsible and prudent leadership but it also delivers for the people of Saskatchewan like never before under the old Liberal government.

In budget 2008, this Conservative government is building on the already significant support we have given Saskatchewan: \$4.2 million for the cull breeding swine program; \$10 million for Saskatoon's own Canadian light source synchrotron; \$12 million to hire new front line police officers; \$15 million to help improve public transit; \$36 million to support vulnerable communities and laid off workers; \$240 million for carbon capture and storage in Saskatchewan; and, the landmark tax-free savings account benefiting every Saskatchewan taxpayer.

All these measures and many more will make Saskatchewan and its residents big winners in budget 2008. No wonder Saskatchewan's premier, Brad Wall, is full of praise, saying that this demonstrates an understanding of Saskatchewan priorities by the Prime Minister and the MPs from the area.

We agree, for when it comes to understanding Saskatchewan, unlike the Liberals, we are up to the job and getting it done.

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[Translation]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in 2005, agriculture in the central Quebec region generated approximately \$1 billion in revenues. The processing sector produced \$1.4 billion in manufactured goods, the retail sector generated \$550 million in sales, and food services brought in \$230 million.

Agriculture provides some 6,500 jobs, and the processing sector has been growing steadily, providing jobs for 4,400 people.

Food services and retail sales provide 4,300 and 3,200 jobs, respectively, and lastly, the wholesale sector accounts for 700 jobs, according to the figures from 2005.

Central Quebec is also known for its production of sheep's milk, industrial goat's milk, eggs, dairy cattle, and pork. This sector is alive and kicking, and it is making a significant contribution to our economy.

* * *

●(1410)

THE BUDGET

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, our government tabled a balanced, focused and prudent budget to strengthen Canada and Quebec amidst global economic uncertainty.

For Quebec, the Conservative budget means: \$12.9 million for a cull breeding swine program; \$24 million to boost tourism along the St. Lawrence and Saguenay rivers; \$92 million to hire more police officers; \$116 million for public transit; \$217 million for the community development trust; and \$326 million for infrastructure initiatives.

Thanks to our government, Quebec will receive more than \$16.7 billion this year in federal transfers, an increase of more than \$4.5 billion since 2005.

So why does the Bloc Québécois oppose this budget?

I need only quote one of their members. "We would not dare vote a third time with the Conservatives on the budget. If we do, people will begin to question our relevance in Ottawa".

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[English]

MIDDLE EAST

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Monday night in Toronto, I joined more than 2,000 fellow citizens connected live via satellite with hundreds in the Israeli border town of Sderot, thanks to the efforts of the United Jewish Appeal Federation of Greater Toronto.

The objective was twofold: first, to show solidarity with the men and women who, together with their families, are prepared to endure ongoing physical and psychological trauma to live according to the values and tenets that have become iconic in western democratic societies; and second, to draw attention to the ongoing terror visited upon them by outlaw organizations, such as Hamas in Gaza.

In the last seven years, Hamas has rained 8,000 missiles and rockets upon Sderot and its citizens, which is more than three missiles per day, every day of the year, and with impunity.

The citizens of Sderot are fighting Hamas with their courage. Will our government match it with a public condemnation of Hamas' criminal activity?

Statements by Members

THE BUDGET

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, budget 2008 is a great news budget for British Columbia.

For B.C., we have increased spending on health care over last year.

We have increased spending on education.

We are boosting our support for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

We are investing to promote B.C.'s forestry industry in new international markets.

We are fighting crime by hiring more police officers.

We are investing in rapid transit by supporting the Evergreen SkyTrain extension to the tri-cities. The Canadian Urban Transit Association says, "This is a good news budget for transit". The chair of TransLink, Dale Parker, goes further, saying our support for the Evergreen line is "fantastic news" for metro Vancouver's transit system.

In opposing the budget, the NDP is voting against the Evergreen line and against these important gains for British Columbia.

For over two years, through three budgets, the Conservative government has delivered for British Columbia. We have delivered British Columbians the results they deserve. They are getting great government and great results from this Conservative government.

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MICKEY RENAUD

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow the Windsor Spitfires of the Ontario Hockey League will play their first home game since the tragic death last week of their 19 year old captain, Mickey Renaud.

To all who knew him, Mickey was a young man of great character. He belied the notion that toughness and skill on the ice could not be matched by caring and generosity away from it.

As the captain of the Spitfires, he demonstrated leadership, dedication to his team and a talent that led the Calgary Flames to draft him in 2007.

Away from the rink, he touched many in the community by reaching out to youth in elementary schools and to special needs students at his high school, St. Anne's Catholic Secondary School, in his hometown of Tecumseh.

Those who are not from the Windsor area may find it hard to appreciate his impact on the community, yet since his untimely death thousands from across Windsor and Essex County have poured out their affection and respect for him in numerous expressions of condolences as well as donations to the Windsor Spitfires Foundation.

Statements by Members

As the Spitfires resume their regular season, they do so without the physical presence of their captain. However, his spirit will continue, with visible reminders of his number 18 painted on the boards and sewn into team jerseys, as well as the invisible memory of his character etched into the hearts and minds of those who knew him.

Our thoughts and prayers are with Mickey's parents, Mark and Jane, his brother and sister, Remy and Penny, and their extended family.

* * *

• (1415)

[Translation]

YOUTH

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, recently, at my riding office, I hosted an outstanding group of school-aged young people who won a contest sponsored by the *National Post* to produce a news publication. Twenty-two young people aged 7 to 15 joined forces and put together a top-notch publication, the *Millennium Mirror*, which came out last October.

The publication not only shows all the hard work that went into it, but it contains themes that reflect openness to others, cultural pluralism, peace, preservation of the environment and community involvement, values that these young people want to build on for our society and the world of today and tomorrow.

That is why I am very honoured to pay tribute to these young people, who, through their commitment and intelligence, have set an example for us in this House. Thank you for inspiring us and for helping to make the world a better place.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in their budget, the Conservatives decided to put all their extra cash towards the debt. They increased military spending, maintained help to western oil companies and promoted nuclear development while entire sectors of Quebec's economy, hit by crises in the manufacturing and forestry sectors, are suffering because of Ottawa's laissez-faire attitude.

Workers have also been abandoned and many organizations were counting on this budget for a little help. It is true the Conservatives established a reserve for the employment insurance fund but they are endorsing pillage of the fund by refusing to return the \$54 billion already drawn. This money belongs to workers and employers. The government must return it. Unemployed workers would also like to see the EI system improved.

Quebeckers want a change in direction and major gains for Quebec. Today they are disappointed and this budget does not come anywhere near reflecting their interests and values.

[English]

INTERNATIONAL MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on February 21 I was proud to celebrate International Mother Language Day with my constituents from all around the globe.

Mother languages are a powerful way to preserve and develop our heritage. Canada is proud of its diversity with so many mother languages, including those of our first nations.

International Mother Language Day is celebrated around the world but is not officially observed in Canada. We should work together to recognize this important part of our heritage and make Canada a world leader.

Rabi Alam, of my riding, helped me with Bill C-407, which I presented to recognize this day. I urge champions from all parties to come forward to show their support. *Dhanwad.*

* * *

THE BUDGET

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Finance tabled one of the most fiscally responsible budgets in Canadian history.

It included an unprecedented incentive for Canadians to save with a tax-free savings account. This is the most important federally driven personal finance innovation since the introduction of RRSPs.

RRSPs are intended for retirement, but the tax-free savings account is like an RRSP for everything else in our lives. Canadians can save for anything from a first car or a home renovation to a family vacation.

Even Manitoba's NDP government likes it, so much so that it already announced that it will not apply provincial tax to the new federal government savings plan. To quote Manitoba's NDP finance minister, "these new accounts should be especially helpful in encouraging lower income Manitobans to save".

There we have it. The federal Minister of Finance has demonstrated that his innovative management of the country's finances is not only great for Canadians but is something that all Canadians can appreciate.

ORAL QUESTIONS

• (1420)

[Translation]

BUDGET

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thanks to a decade of hard work by Canadians and healthy Liberal management, this Conservative government inherited a solid financial situation, which it has squandered in two years.

Does the Prime Minister realize that the budget he delivered yesterday would not have been so modest if he had shown some leadership, vision and prudence in managing public funds and in the governance of Canada?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the budget presented by the Minister of Finance is a prudent and focused budget.

What is more, there are a number of different things in our measures: we have increased spending in certain areas; we have cut taxes for Canadians, and we have also reduced the national debt.

I assume that is why the leader of the Liberal Party intends to allow this budget to pass.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Alain Dubuc wrote in *La Presse* this morning that there is something missing in this budget and that something is a vision for the future and a firm grasp of economic issues. He said it lacks leadership.

[English]

The *Globe and Mail* this morning states, “After two years of free spending and big tax cuts”, the finance minister “is facing the consequences of almost emptying his own cupboard”.

Does the Prime Minister realize that this would not have been the case if he had shown vision, leadership and prudence in the management of the public purse and the governance of Canada?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I just said, the budget demonstrates a focused and prudent approach in a period of economic difficulty. We have made important investments in some areas of spending. We have reduced taxes for Canadians and Canadian companies. We are paying down debt.

I want to talk about leadership, vision and credibility. Let me just say for the Leader of the Opposition that when he makes ferocious attacks on a budget that he has every intention of allowing to pass, he simply has no credibility in those attacks.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in talking about a lack of credibility, the lack of credibility of the Prime Minister goes well over just the economy and permeates everything.

Let us look at the so-called climate change plan. The C.D. Howe Institute has said, “The government is likely to miss its 2020 emissions target by almost 200 megatonnes”.

Oral Questions

Why does the Prime Minister not simply adopt a real plan, a plan that will work, the Liberal plan, Bill C-30, the climate change and clean air act that the government shamefully killed last fall?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, I could talk not just about the budget and the important environmental measures in the budget but also the Speech from the Throne. The government has been very clear about its plans and targets for the environment. Not only would I urge the leader of the Liberal Party to adopt them, but I would note that he already has, in fact, by endorsing the Speech from the Throne.

Once again, I would say for the leader of the Liberal Party that he should watch the *Rick Mercer Report* from last night. If he wants to have credibility, he should come out with a balanced assessment rather than making ferocious attacks on matters that he in fact intends to support.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in yesterday's budget, the government snuck in the cancellation of its disastrous ecoAuto rebate program. Canadians need to know just how disastrous it was.

It failed to incentivize the purchase of green vehicles. It had the perverse effect of increasing the market share for gas guzzlers. It burdened Canadian auto manufacturers with a competitive disadvantage.

Will the government now admit that the program was an egregious policy mistake that hurt both the environment and the auto industry?

• (1425)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in budget 2007 the government committed \$160 million over two years to provide incentives to Canadians to purchase and lease more fuel efficient vehicles. This was the government's commitment. In response to the program, manufacturers increased their offerings of fuel efficient vehicles in Canada.

The rebate program has served its purpose in raising consumer awareness of fuel efficient models and encouraging the purchase of new types of vehicles.

[Translation]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is odd; he is praising a program that he is the process of cancelling. That makes no sense.

In 2005, the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy found that the feebate program was not effective. But as always, the government ignored the experts. One year later, after losing time and wasting money, the government has just cancelled that ill-fated program.

Will the government now acknowledge that it was wrong and the experts were right?

Oral Questions

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will do no such thing. Our initiative helped change consumer behaviour. Furthermore, my hon. colleague seems to forget that in the budget that his party is going to support, \$500 million will be allocated to a public transit trust and \$250 million will help in the development of new technologies for the automobile sector.

Finally, let us not forget that this is the first government to implement a regulation for—

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

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Quebec finance minister stated that the federal budget tabled yesterday “did not reflect Quebec’s priorities”. However, as Ms. Jérôme-Forget pointed out several times, the federal government has the financial latitude to help out the manufacturing and forestry sectors, as it did for the automobile industry in Ontario.

In view of the fact that the budget surplus for the current year will be \$10.2 billion, will the Prime Minister finally decide to use some of this surplus to come to the assistance of the working people and companies affected by the crisis in manufacturing and forestry? He still has time to act and he certainly has the means.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we reduced the public debt this year by \$10 billion and at the same time increased program spending by \$13 billion, including considerable assistance for the manufacturing and forestry sectors, seniors and other people.

This is a very balanced, very prudent approach and we are confident that the House will support it.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec, the Quebec Forest Industry Council, the Manufacturiers et exportateurs du Québec, the Government of Quebec, the Parti Québécois and even Mario Dumont, the Prime Minister's pal, have all said they were disappointed by the budget and the lack of measures to assist the manufacturing and forestry sectors.

After this avalanche of criticism, how can the Prime Minister still say that the budget reflects the interests and values of Quebec?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the time of the mini-budget, which was passed, measures were taken to speed things up and help our companies deal with the challenges they face. Both that budget and the budget just tabled contain measures within which our most fragile sectors will be able to function.

I would like to finish by reminding the House that just three weeks ago we passed the community fund, under which the Government of Quebec will receive \$217 million.

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that Quebecers have unanimously spoken out against the Minister of Finance because he has not come up with any real measures to support the manufacturing and forestry industries, which are in crisis. He can remedy the situation before March 31 and use a portion of the \$10.2 billion surplus to stimulate investment and innovation by providing direct assistance to companies hit by the crisis.

Will the minister take action and create a fund to provide companies with refundable contributions to purchase new equipment, instead of putting all the money towards the debt and causing serious trouble for our manufacturing companies?

• (1430)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, not all Quebecers object to this budget. On the contrary, the Conseil du patronat du Québec and the mayor of the City of Montreal are among those who feel that this budget provides a clear direction. We have only to think of the permanent extension of gas tax funding.

If we look at the tax measures, they will enable Quebec not only to meet its commitments, but prepare for the future. There are things in this budget that Quebecers appreciate.

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Ms. Jérôme-Forget, Quebec's finance minister, and François Dupuis and Yves St-Maurice, economists with Mouvement Desjardins, are questioning the Conservatives' decision to pay down the debt at the expense of a more productive, more competitive economy.

Considering the crisis in the manufacturing and forestry industries and the 150,000 jobs that have been lost in the past five years in Quebec, will the minister abandon his ideological position and use a portion of the \$10.2 billion surplus to improve his aid package? Quebec is still waiting for a positive response to its demands.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the economy of Canada and the economy of Quebec are on a solid footing. Unemployment is at its lowest level in 33 years. We all know it, but the Bloc Québécois members do not talk about it.

And they will certainly not talk about the millennium scholarship program. They will not want to talk about that, because it was dealt with in the spirit of open federalism, as André Pratte said today. In addition, there is the new savings account that will enable Quebecers to save more money—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Toronto—Danforth.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, health care workers are saying that this budget completely ignores the health sector. Physiotherapists are saying that the federal budget offers nothing substantial for the health sector. Even the Canadian Medical Association was critical of the fact that the doctor shortage was completely ignored, while 5 million people do not have their own family doctor.

Why is the Prime Minister breaking his health care promises and not giving another cent to shorten waiting lists?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the NDP has it all wrong. For example, in this budget there is new money for Genome Canada, for mental health, for the safety of health products and for students studying in medical fields. There are a number of measures in this budget for the health sector and for many other Canadian priorities.

[*English*]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the word “health” barely even squeezes itself into the budget. There is nothing to deal with the nursing shortage. There is nothing to deal with the shortage of doctors. Five million Canadians do not have a doctor for their families. There is absolutely not a word about dealing with the crisis of home care and long term care faced by working families these days. When it comes to prescription drugs that people cannot afford for their health, the government turns a blind eye.

Why does the government, now supported by the Liberals, turn its back on the health care system of Canada and leave Canadian families without what they need for the good health of their members?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has made important investments in health care in Genome Canada, in the Mental Health Commission, in health product safety, in the training of medical students and in record transfers to the provinces for health care. The problem is the opposition leader has a view that all we should do is spend, spend, spend and no matter how much we spend, it is not enough.

The truth of the matter is we have made some important investments in spending. We have reduced taxes. We are paying down debt. Canadians want that balanced approach.

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ETHICS

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 1989 Brian Mulroney condemned the Chinese government for the “indiscriminate shooting” of peaceful demonstrators in Tiananmen Square. However, at the ethics committee, he claimed that three years later he was “warmly received” by the same government and tried to sell it armoured vehicles, in violation of an arms embargo that Canada initiated. It is not believable, but Canadians will never know the truth because Mr. Mulroney is arrogantly avoiding a committee of Parliament.

Will the Prime Minister publicly call on his former idol, his mentor, to be accountable and appear before the ethics committee?

• (1435)

The Speaker: Order, please. I am not sure the question falls within the administrative competence of the government, but I see the government House leader wants to respond. Perhaps he will say something that is relevant.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, very simply, I understand the individual did appear before the ethics committee once already. The government has responded to this issue through the establishment of Professor Johnston's assessment of what should be done. He has made recommendations

about the holding of a public inquiry. The government is acting on those. We are awaiting the completion of the work of the ethics committee so the public inquiry can proceed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, is there a problem with using the name of Brian Mulroney? Is he the individual? The only thing left is to hold a public inquiry.

In November, the Prime Minister promised to launch a public inquiry, but he did nothing. He also promised to define the terms of this inquiry, but he did nothing.

Will this government immediately launch a public inquiry in response to Mr. Mulroney's lack of respect towards this Parliament?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the members opposite are familiar with what Professor Johnston is doing and what the government is doing in that regard.

What is remarkable is the only time there is any excitement on the other side is when the members discuss issues from about two decades ago.

* * *

AIRBUS

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Brian Mulroney received \$2.1 million from the Canadian taxpayers based in part on his statement that he had never had any dealings with Karlheinz Schreiber. That is as inaccurate as a Conservative campaign ad. We know now that Mr. Mulroney did have dealings with Schreiber and took envelopes stuffed with \$1,000 bills while he was an MP.

Now that he has decided to snub a parliamentary committee examining this issue, will the government launch an immediate legal process to get back the millions of taxpayer money that went to Brian Mulroney?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the Liberals' obsession with matters decades ago. Now they want a review of things that the Liberal government decided to do.

Those are all very interesting things, but yesterday we had a budget. It dealt with the environment. It dealt with job creation. It dealt with health. It dealt with ensuring that we continued to keep our economy on a sound course. It was balanced. It was prudent.

The Liberals do not want to ask any questions about it. I think that tells us where the Liberal Party is in this day and age. It is about two decades behind.

Oral Questions

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Department of Justice was looking at reopening the settlement, once it was known that Brian Mulroney did take money from Karlheinz Schreiber. However, that process was mysteriously stopped dead in its tracks.

Who stopped that investigation? Will the Conservative government now put the law ahead of protecting its political idol and get back the Mulroney millions?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Professor Johnston offered a report that answered those questions and indicated which questions required further exploration. The government will act on that as soon as the ethics committee is done.

As soon as the Liberals are ready to talk about the issues of this day and the future and where the country will go in the future, we will be happy to talk to them about that. In the interim, we will keep governing and delivering the kind of government Canadians want to see and not worry about this stuff.

* * *

[*Translation*]

MANUFACTURING AND FORESTRY INDUSTRIES

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, *La Presse* columnist Alain Dubuc described the Conservative government's ideology as dinosaur-age conservatism because it has refused to take action to address the crisis. Instead of investing to save jobs, the minister claims that the provinces should do as he has done and lower corporate taxes. The only ones who have benefited from that solution are the oil companies.

When will the minister pay attention to what most Quebecers think and use the surplus to resolve the crisis in the manufacturing and forestry industries?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, we have taken action, reasonable and prudent action. The Minister of Finance tabled a budget that takes appropriate action with respect to Canada's economy. Debt reduction means that Canadian companies and taxpayers will pay lower taxes. We have set a course for the future. We have given Canadian companies the tools they need to face major challenges in the years to come. It is—

• (1440)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Trois-Rivières.

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when mad cow disease was wreaking havoc on Alberta's herds, government assistance went primarily to Alberta. When auto assembly lines closed in Ontario, the government put together a \$250 million aid package especially for that province. Now that Quebec is being hammered by the crisis in the manufacturing and forestry industries, Alberta is getting proportionally more money. Crises in the rest of Canada get targeted measures; crises in Quebec get pro-rated measures.

How does the minister respond to claims made by Mario Dumont and Ms. Jérôme-Forget that all of the money to help the

manufacturing and forestry industries is going to Ontario, and none of it to Quebec?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not true at all. Let us not forget that this House passed a measure giving Quebec access to \$217 million from a fund for communities. In addition, the targeted older workers initiative has been extended to 2012, at a cost of \$90 million. As my hon. colleague said earlier, these transfers will add up to an extra \$1.6 billion for Quebec.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, with good reason, Quebec's finance minister is denouncing the absence of measures to support older workers who lose their jobs. Indeed, \$60 million is needed to create a support program. For workers who have spent 30 years in the forest and lose their jobs, like those with Louisiana-Pacific in Saint-Michel-des-Saints, retraining is very difficult, if not impossible.

I would like to extend an invitation to the minister. Is he willing to come to meet these workers, who are meeting this evening, to tell them that they do not have to move to Alberta, go back to school or go hungry?

[*English*]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great tragedy whenever someone loses a job because there is a factory shutdown. Whenever that occurs, of course, Service Canada is on site to provide people with options, but this government is not standing idly by.

We have invested in new labour market arrangements and \$3 billion in new training programs to help workers step into jobs. Older workers are being more successful in stepping into jobs than any other workers. Yesterday, we announced that the targeted initiative for older workers will be extended with \$19 million in new funding for older workers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Gravel (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this government's ideology compels it to put everything towards the debt, forgetting that it owes a basic debt to our seniors. It is breaking a promise that it made to seniors, namely, to make the guaranteed income supplement fully retroactive.

Instead of telling them to go back to work if they want a decent income, as is the case with the measure announced in this budget, why does the government refuse to pay its debts to our seniors, putting everything towards the debt instead?

[*English*]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every time we bring forward initiatives designed to help seniors, it is the Bloc that opposes them. This is very sad.

This government has increased the guaranteed income supplement by 7% over the last two years, over and above the cost of living. We have put in place numerous tax measures designed to leave more money in the pockets of seniors and every time the Bloc votes against it.

Today, we are announcing an increase in the income exemption for the guaranteed income supplement to \$3,500. Again, the Bloc members are speaking against it. Shame on them.

* * *

MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the environment minister is running radio ads that acknowledge that he personally meddled in the municipal campaign to help his friend Larry O'Brien get elected and that he, and he alone, killed the Ottawa light rail project.

The ad says, "he's bold, he's loud", but the trouble is he abused his position, acted unilaterally, and cost the taxpayers money. Why did he violate his ministerial mandate and then pay to brag about it?

•(1445)

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, everything in the question is, of course, false. The Ethics Commissioner investigated this at the request of the Liberals and the Ethics Commissioner said nothing improper happened here. The Treasury Board Secretariat has said that no impropriety happened here at all.

Ottawa City Council itself voted against the light rail project. The Minister of the Environment, then president of the Treasury Board, has always stood up for his constituents and has always done a great job for taxpayers.

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that was then, but yesterday a top official at Treasury Board testified at committee that it was not Treasury Board that requested the contract from the City of Ottawa. Further, the official could not cite a single example of a major contribution agreement with the municipality being approved, then withheld until a yet to be elected council could sign off. We now know it was the minister acting alone.

If this was not purely political meddling, could the minister name one other contribution agreement that had to meet this same political test?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, unfortunately, the Liberals here are doing what they do worst. They are attacking people without any evidence whatsoever.

The Ethics Commissioner was clear that no wrongdoing took place here. The train project was defeated by the elected Liberal government, which included the votes of five former Liberal candidates.

The then President of the Treasury Board did his job, the rules were followed and nothing improper took place, except that the

Oral Questions

Liberals are going to, unfortunately, lose. A false scandal is going to blow up in their faces yet again.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is the minister who is costing Ottawa hundreds of millions of dollars in lawsuits because he broke the rules and abused his power to get his friend elected.

Yesterday, his deputy minister made it clear that the minister acted alone and outside his department's authority. It was a transport decision, not Treasury Board's, yet the minister overrode the light rail project. Seven government departments, the province and Ottawa City Council signed off on the project, yet this minister killed it.

Will the minister admit that it was his decision, that he acted alone, and he did so to elect Larry O'Brien?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, my colleague from Ajax—Pickering has his facts wrong. It was the elected city council of Ottawa that voted down the light rail project. In fact, the people of Ottawa do not need a member of Parliament from Toronto telling them what they need in their community.

The then president of the Treasury Board did his job. The Ethics Commissioner says so. The Treasury Board Secretariat says so. There is in fact nothing wrong that took place here. Nice try.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps we can hear from the minister. Because of the minister's meddling, his interference, his gamesmanship, he has created a \$280 million liability for Ottawa, \$280 million that has to be picked up by taxpayers, all because he wanted to elect his friend mayor.

If he wants to run more radio ads, maybe he should run it on that. Stop the spin and the bluster, and finally just tell the truth.

Will he look the citizens of Ottawa in the face and admit that he acted alone, he abused his power, and that he has left them on the hook for hundreds of millions of dollars?

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals can applaud the question like trained seals cleaning chalkboard erasers, but the fact is there is no truth at all to the allegation. The reality is the Ethics Commissioner said nothing improper happened here; all the rules were followed.

I know some good friends of mine who live in Pickering. They want a member of Parliament who is interested in the public good, not the personal smear. The people of Pickering deserve a member of Parliament who is interested in public policy, not this sort of nonsense where without any evidence whatsoever he tries to destroy people's reputations.

*Oral Questions***MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY**

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this Conservative government takes the manufacturing and aerospace industries seriously. We are committed to creating new jobs and providing the right programs to ensure industries in Ontario and throughout Canada succeed.

Recently, the Minister of Industry announced a \$19.6 million repayable loan for a pre-competitive R and D program being undertaken by Diamond Aircraft in London.

Would the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry explain to this House the importance of this funding for the company, the London region and for Canada?

• (1450)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member from London for all his hard work with the manufacturing and aerospace sectors.

This Conservative government recognizes the world class ability of Canada's aerospace industry and we are giving it the tools to compete and win. Through the strategic aerospace and defence initiative repayable loans program, companies like Diamond Aircraft will build on Canada's aerospace strengths and grow our international leadership.

These investments will attract more foreign investments, leverage private sector R and D investments, and create significant economic spinoffs and new high-paying manufacturing jobs.

This strategic funding—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Outremont.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is a sad day for workers in the forestry industry. Yesterday's budget completely abandons entire communities. As my good friend Guy Chevrette from the Quebec Forest Industry Council said, "this government ... has thrown in the towel and wants market forces to take care of the mess in the forestry industry."

Why are the Minister of Finance and the Conservative government choosing to abandon the families of workers in the softwood lumber, furniture and paper sectors?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just the contrary. I am sure the hon. member recalls just a month ago, in January, the announcement of the community trust development fund. There was \$1 billion, not designed for corporations but designed to help people who have been harmed by the adjustments in the forestry sector, among other sectors in the economy.

There was tax relief for the forestry sector in the economic statement, more than a billion dollars. There is the innovation investment in the forestry sector, \$127 million, and help for older workers, as my colleague the Minister of Human Resources—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Outremont.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, corporations or people? Let us look at some facts. Table 5.4 on page 201 of the budget proves that over the next two years the government will have increased total personal income taxes by 12%, while at the same time slashing those of the most profitable corporations by 14%.

Why have the Conservatives chosen to stick hard-working Canadian families with the bill for their latest gift to their corporate buddies?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, surely the hon. member recognizes that in the course of a little bit over two years our government has reduced the tax burden and provided tax relief to Canadians by almost \$200 billion over this year and the next five years. Of that, \$140 billion is attributable to individuals and families in Canada.

More than that, yesterday we introduced the most significant tax savings plan since the RRSP in 1957, the tax-free savings account which will help all Canadians save and avoid tax on their savings.

* * *

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the court confirmed that the actions of the Prime Minister, with his attack on the rights of farmers through the Canadian Wheat Board, were illegal again.

The Court of Appeal upheld the earlier Federal Court ruling which found the government attempted to illegally use regulations to undermine the board. The judges made it clear that section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act must be abided by.

Will the Minister of Agriculture respect the law, including section 47.1, as confirmed by the courts?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we will respect are the wishes of western Canadian producers. Some 62% of them want out from underneath the board.

The member for Malpeque came out to Saskatchewan last week. He ran around. He put on four meetings to save the Wheat Board. He had a handful of people at each one. None of them were producers.

We listen to farmers. He can be stuck in his political rut.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 13.8% is not a majority of farmers. As they told me in his riding, they disagree with him. They want a new member.

Today, his answer is that he will introduce legislation, not to mention that the other day he introduced legislation and it does not abide by section 47.1.

The courts have spoken. Just last night they informed him he could not do what he said publicly he would do.

Is the Prime Minister going to condone another lawmaker in his cabinet?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1455)

The Speaker: Order, please. We will have a little order. It is very hard to hear these questions and answers.

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Malpeque is so wrapped up in his rhetoric, he even gets it wrong himself. Nobody is listening anyway.

We will proceed ahead. Western Canadian farmers have spoken clearly. We know that number is well above 80% now wanting out from underneath the cloak of secrecy at the Wheat Board.

It is going to happen. Western Canadian farmers are voting with their air seeders. They are voting with their trucks. They are not growing Wheat Board commodities. They are pulling away.

The Wheat Board is going to fold its tent and blow away like a bad dream.

* * *

[Translation]

COPYRIGHT ACT

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week the minister responsible for developing the new copyright act violated the law. That is another example of the government breaking the law and then denying it. When asked about it yesterday, the minister tried to laugh it off, as though it were a good joke.

Does the minister not realize that he stole from artists last week?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, that issue is actually resolved. I guess the member for Beauséjour is a little bit out of touch, not surprisingly. The Liberals are obsessed with issues from the past, issues that are resolved and issues that do not exist.

The reality is the Liberals are trying to distract attention from that document which laid out in detail the Liberal campaign commitments so far. Those commitments would have resulted in \$65 billion of deficit.

No wonder the Liberals do not want to go to the voters now. I would not want to try to sell that ballot bill of goods.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week the industry minister stood in a room full of journalists and brazenly violated his own copyright law. Yesterday he was joking about stealing from artists. The minister who breaks the copyright law should not be the minister writing the law.

Now that he has blown what little credibility he had left, will the minister step aside and let somebody who respects the law actually write the new law?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again that issue is resolved and I do not know where the

hon. member is stuck. Yes, actually, I do know where he is stuck. He is stuck in those old Liberal policies of a couple of decades ago: the \$65 billion in deficit; the high taxes; the high spending; let us get that GST back up again; let us put this country in debt and deficit. That is their alternative. Then when they test ran it, what did they say? "Hmm, that might not work. We better support the guys who really know how to run the economy". That is why they will let our budget pass.

* * *

[Translation]

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, by doing nothing to support the manufacturing and forestry sectors, the Conservative government is once again abandoning the regions of Quebec. Not only is this government turning its back on the regions—there is practically nothing in this budget for regional development—even worse, it is jeopardizing existing structures essential to regional development, such as non-profit organizations.

Rather than using the entire surplus to pay down the debt, will the government put in place meaningful measures for hard-hit regions or will it continue to ignore them and leave them to their own devices?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind this House once again that we intend to continue supporting non-profit economic organizations. We want to help those organizations that present one-time projects, that is projects with a beginning, middle and end. As for the other organizations that have been dealing with the government for a number of years, they will have a two-year transition period to become self-sufficient.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, let us look at what this government is offering in terms of the environment.

The government did not even have the time to implement a green vehicle rebate program and it is already being cancelled. Worse yet, it is the \$300 million measure for nuclear energy that clearly shows its agenda and its priority. Greenpeace Quebec describes this budget as awful and Équiterre talks about this government's recklessness when it comes to the environment, and they are right.

Why does the government always favour the polluters, like the rich oil companies, to the detriment of those who are making real efforts to help the environment?

• (1500)

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the budget contains a good number of initiatives to support our environment.

Oral Questions

The Bloc Québécois will be voting against public transit measures for Montreal. It will be voting against the biggest expansion of carbon capture and storage in the world. It will be voting against federal tax treatment for environmental initiatives. It will be voting against a carbon market in Montreal.

That is how bad the Bloc Québécois is.

* * *

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. John Maloney (Welland, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, more than 100 workers in the Niagara region have sent letters to their local Conservative MP, who is the current justice minister, to share their concerns about the crisis facing the auto sector. The answer they got showed how little their elected representatives in Ottawa care about their uncertain situation.

Why do highly skilled workers in the Niagara Peninsula have to beg for assistance from the government only to get the back of the hand from the minister?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I did receive a number of letters. There were no individual addresses so I sent my reply to the only address I had, which was the CAW office in St. Catharines.

I pointed out, among other things, our government's support for the automotive industry and our support for a fair deal with Korea that would work in the best interests of all Canadians.

When I was there for the 20th anniversary of that corporation, I also pointed out how appreciative I was of the positive comments directed toward me for the \$2 million I got the federal government to invest in that plant.

* * *

UGANDA

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the ongoing war in northern Uganda has claimed an estimated 300,000 lives, displaced more than 1.5 million people, and seen the kidnapping of tens of thousands of women and children. It is Africa's longest running armed conflict. Next to Darfur, it is being called the world's worst humanitarian disaster.

Could the Minister of Foreign Affairs please inform the House what our government is doing to support the current peace talks to stop this terrible war in northern Uganda?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what our government is doing is very simple. We are concerned about this important humanitarian situation. We have committed \$3.5 million to support the peace talks. We will be an official observer at the Juba peace talks.

We aim to achieve our goal to double our humanitarian aid to Africa.

* * *

HOMELESSNESS

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the budget does nothing to address the homelessness crisis.

Report after report from community after community has called for federal action. Every day when we walk city streets, drive by overpasses, or let someone surf on our couch, our hearts tell us we are failing. What is the Conservative response? Pilot projects, nothing to actually build homes and nothing to make housing affordable.

Conservatives give corporations tax cuts years into the future, but even in a crisis will not fund a long term national housing program. Why not?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, how ironic that the member would raise this issue, as it was his party that voted against the \$1.4 billion housing trust that helps us provide more resources for affordable housing today than any government has ever done.

I do think it is important that the member not diminish the importance of the Mental Health Commission support projects, including the one in Vancouver. I want to quote Michael Kirby, chair of the Mental Health Commission, who said, "Collectively, the projects will develop a body of evidence which will enable Canada to lead the world in providing services—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Trinity—Spadina.

* * *

CHILD CARE

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for every \$1 in spending, the Conservative government gives \$6 in corporate tax giveaways and subsidies.

Despite promising to deliver child care spaces in the last election, there is not one single penny in the budget for child care.

Can the government explain why its agenda, supported by the Liberals, has billions of dollars for big banks and big polluters, but absolutely nothing for children? Where are the child care spaces that were promised to hard-working families?

● (1505)

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. It gives me the chance to point out that when this government came to power, we put in place the universal child care benefit which provides direct support to 1.5 million families on behalf of two million children.

More than that, since we struck an agreement with the provinces last spring, they have announced their intention to create 33,000 child care spaces across this country.

We are proud of our record in helping families.

*Routine Proceedings***STATUS OF WOMEN**

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government killed the court challenges program, shut down the law commission and refuses to fund women's groups that do advocacy work.

The government falsely claims that it stands up for women's equality but prohibits groups advocating for equality from getting the money they need for their work.

Why does the government fund some advocacy groups, its favourites, but deliberately discriminates against women?

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind this House that we are working very hard for women, and that all women in Canada and Quebec have the right to be defended and heard by this government.

* * *

[English]

LAKE SIMCOE

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my riding is home to Lake Simcoe and beautiful Kempenfelt Bay. The lake provides drinking water to eight municipalities and is known for its recreation industry which generates more than \$200 million in annual revenues. Recently there have been some concerns raised about the lake's high phosphorus levels.

Could the Minister of the Environment please tell the House if the government has plans to address this issue that affects the health of the residents who make their homes around Lake Simcoe?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are tremendously concerned about Lake Simcoe. I was pleased recently to announce a further \$18 million, bringing the total to \$30 million to help clean up Lake Simcoe.

For 13 long years Lake Simcoe's health declined. Nothing was done. What did it take? It took five Conservative MPs and the money was there to get the job done.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

[English]

In accordance with its order of reference of Friday, February 1, 2008, the committee has considered Bill C-33, An Act to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, and agreed on Tuesday, February 26, to report it with amendment.

[Translation]

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 113(1), I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 13th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of the legislative committee on Bill C-20, An Act to provide for consultations with electors on their preferences for appointments to the Senate.

• (1510)

[English]

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 113(1), the report is deemed adopted.

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BOTTLED WATER LABELLING ACT

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-514, An Act respecting the labelling of bottled water.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the western Arctic for seconding this bill.

Canadians are concerned about the quality of bottled water. In fact, 20% of Canadians depend on bottled water for their exclusive use every day. Sadly, bottled water is not regulated at present. This private member's bill would require bottled water to be labelled to ensure quality, to make sure the source is identified, and to ensure that those who are bottling the water will provide information so that if consumers need to get in touch with them, they can.

Finally, I want to give credit to Tony Clarke from the Polaris Institute, and his excellent work on this issue, and the book entitled, *Inside the Bottle*, which provided me with the evidence to bring forward this private member's bill.

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

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DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC PROSECUTIONS

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations and I believe you would find the unanimous consent of the House for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, the question on the following motion shall be deemed put, a recorded division deemed requested and the vote deferred to the end of government orders on Monday, March 3, 2008.

That, for the purposes of subsection 4(4) of the Director of Public Prosecutions Act, the proposed appointment of Mr. Brian J. Saunders as the Director of Public Prosecutions be referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

The Speaker: Does the hon. government House leader have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Routine Proceedings

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, could the government House leader confirm the date he has in mind for the taking of the vote? I, unfortunately, missed that and I would ask him to confirm the timing of the vote on this matter.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, the vote is deferred to the end of government orders on Monday, March 3, 2008, which is normally 6:30 p.m.

The Speaker: 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)

* * *

PETITIONS

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thanks to the efforts of B'nai Brith Canada, I have the pleasure of presenting a third petition this week in the House. This one has been signed by several hundred people.

The petition, pursuant to Standing Order 36, draws to the attention of the House of Commons the long-standing, unrequited international issue of Eli Cohen.

Mr. Cohen was tortured, unjustly tried, convicted and hanged by a Syrian military court without legal representation and despite international protest. All his family asks is for the return of his remains for a proper burial as per the redemption of hostages tenet so central to the Jewish faith.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to use all reasonable means but not excluding the application of economic sanctions and severing of diplomatic ties with Syria in order to cause a return of Mr. Cohen's remains for a proper burial in Israel.

• (1515)

[Translation]

LAC SAINT-PIERRE

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table a petition calling on the government to assume its responsibilities and take action to remove the shells from Lac Saint-Pierre, thereby giving the citizens and communities safe access to the lake and furthering its prospects for sustainable development.

ESTIMAUVILLE SECTOR

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition with 2,728 signatures calling on Parliament to support the Estimaerville sector for the relocation of federal government employees already in the Quebec City area. The petitioners point out that revitalizing the Estimaerville artery is one of Quebec City's economic priorities.

[English]

AGE OF CONSENT

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of rising on behalf of my constituents, members of the Catholic Women's League of Canada, St. Leonard's Catholic Church, along with the parishioners of St. Leonard's Church in Brampton. They are all requesting that the legal age of sexual consent be raised from the age of 14 to 18 years old to safeguard children from sexual exploitation and abuse.

There are 100 signatures and I commend all of them for putting this petition forward.

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition signed by more than 500 people in my riding who want the government to know that in the context of globalization, where WTO negotiations are threatening our food sovereignty and our agriculture, it is of the utmost importance that our voices be heard. Quebec's agriculture is part of our culture and identity. Let us not leave it up to other countries to decide what we will eat in the future.

The petitioners are calling on the House of Commons, as a parliamentary assembly, to have the Prime Minister promise to protect Quebec agriculture, its specificity and the supply management system, thereby guaranteeing our food sovereignty.

ESTIMAUVILLE SECTOR

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of tabling a petition signed by over 2,800 people from the Quebec City area. They are calling on Parliament to support the Estimaerville sector for the relocation of federal government employees already in Quebec City. They point out that revitalizing the Estimaerville artery is one of Quebec City's economic priorities.

[English]

SECURITY AND PROSPERITY PARTNERSHIP

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, flowing from a public meeting that I and the members for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek and Hamilton Mountain, held on Hamilton Mountain, I am honoured today to present a petition from residents in the city of Hamilton who are concerned about the Conservative government's undemocratic negotiation of the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America.

They call upon the government to stop this deal until a transparent, accountable and democratic process has been established, including a full debate and vote in the House of Commons.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to support Canadian content requirements for public transportation projects.

It is calling on the Government of Canada to implement a policy which is consistent with the North American Free Trade Agreement and World Trade Organization policies and guidelines to mandate Canadian content levels for public transportation projects and to ensure that public funds are used to provide the best value to Canadians by supporting domestic supplier and labour markets.

[*Translation*]

BILL C-482

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I am tabling a petition with 420 signatures. These Quebecers support Bill C-482 and are calling on the federal government to take tangible action showing that it respects the Quebec nation and Bill 101.

[*English*]

FOREIGN AID

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition circulated by the Greater Van Gogos in Vancouver, on the Lower Mainland and on the Sunshine Coast. In fact, two of them are here in Ottawa, Peggy Rasmussen and Peggy Edwards who are part of Canadian Grandmothers for Africa. They have collected nearly 700 signatures drawing Parliament's attention to the growing crisis of AIDS in Africa.

The petitioners bring to our attention that 25 million to 30 million people in sub-Saharan Africa are infected with HIV but only about one in five of them have access to the antiviral medication that is necessary to save their lives.

Fourteen hundred children die every day of AIDS and the petitioners are asking for compassion, for effort and for focus in order to narrow the gap between the haves and the have nothings in our world.

The petitioners are calling upon Parliament to increase funding for generic antiretroviral drug exports from Canada to Africa in order to help save lives on the ground.

I commend the petitioners and thank them for their hard work and for the compassion that they have shown for the world's poorest.

● (1520)

GOVERNMENT PROGRAM FUNDING

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to present a petition, with approximately 1,000 signatures, on behalf of the Canadian law students.

The students are calling upon the Government of Canada to reinstate the court challenges program with at least the funding that it enjoyed prior to September 2006; to reinstate the Law Commission of Canada with at least the funding that it enjoyed prior to September 2006; to reinstate funding to the Status of Women Canada with at least that funding that it enjoyed prior to September 2006 with a return to its original mandate, including funding for advocacy, lobbying and general research for women's rights, and to return the word "equality" to the goals of the agency.

I commend the Canadian law students for their work. I think they are the future and they have shown a tremendous amount of leadership.

Routine Proceedings

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a great number of Canadian citizens have brought this petition to me. It is on a very important issue. It is to provide additional protections to pregnant mothers and their unborn children in support of Bill C-484.

I would like to submit this petition at this time.

INCOME TRUSTS

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to present a petition on the subject of income trusts.

The petitioners note the Prime Minister's statement that there was no greater fraud than a promise not kept. They note his brazen broken promise on the subject of income trusts. They also note testimony to the effect that the information on which the decision was based was flawed.

They request that the government recognize that the justification was flawed, that the government expresses its apology to those who suffered loss and that the government immediately retract its punitive 31.5% tax rate.

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN MINING COMPANIES

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table a petition concerning mining companies in this House today on behalf of a number of citizens of the riding of Lévis—Bellechasse and Les Etchemins.

Canada is currently a world leader in mining exploration. A Canada-wide consultation was held, in an effort to improve social responsibility.

This petition calls for the creation of an ombudsman's office, which would receive complaints, investigate and propose measures to ensure that Canadian mining companies respect human and environmental rights. It also calls for this ombudsman to be independent.

I would like to congratulate the members of Development and Peace in my riding, who drew up this petition.

[*English*]

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased and honoured to present another 1,533 names on a petition supporting Bill C-484. This is a bill that calls for Parliament to enact legislation to recognize unborn children as separate victims when their mothers are the object of the commission of an offence.

The Budget

I am very impressed. These petitioners come from Toronto, Winnipeg, Vancouver and other large cities, but I noticed in my estimate that all of the citizens of Kamsack signed it. Members have probably never even heard of Kamsack. It is in Saskatchewan. We also have a whole bunch of names from the little town where I was born, Swift Current, Saskatchewan.

* * *

● (1525)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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 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 would ask you to call Motion No. P-32.

Motion No. P-32

That a humble Address be presented to Her Excellency praying that she will cause to be laid before this House a copy of the 2004 Memorandum of Agreement between the Tsawwassen Indian Band and the Vancouver Port Authority with regard to the expansion of the Roberts Bank Port.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, Notice of Motion for the Production of Papers No. P-32, in the name of the hon. member for Delta—Richmond East, is acceptable to the government and this document is tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that Motion No. P-32 be deemed to have been adopted?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the other notices of motions for the production of papers be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is it agreed that the remaining notices of motions for the production of papers stand?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE

The House resumed from February 26 consideration of the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to deliver my response to the finance minister's budget speech from yesterday.

As I have said publicly many times since he tabled it, the budget does not really contain any initiatives that should excite Canadians but, at the same time, it does not have much that should overly concern them either, at least not in the near term.

As a result, the Liberal Party will allow this budget to pass through the House. I see no reason to cause a \$350 million election and send Canadians to the polls over a document that does not do much that is harmful to the country. However, I have questions on a few of the proposals, which have shown for the first time that the Conservatives are willing to listen to the demands of the opposition. It has shown that the Prime Minister is willing to listen to the leader of the official opposition.

[Translation]

Here are some examples: making the gas tax transfer permanent, as we committed in February 2007; providing direct support to the auto sector, as we called for in January 2008; creating jobs and improving public transit through additional investments in infrastructure, as we advocated in February 2008; and increasing the northern residents deduction, as we promised in December 2007.

[English]

Here is what CTV's Bob Fife had to say about the finance minister's budget:

Look what he's done here. He's stolen the Liberal idea on help for the auto sector. He's stolen Liberal idea on job creation through infrastructure. And he's stolen the Liberal idea of making the gas tax for municipalities permanent.

A few weeks ago the finance minister was swearing up and down that there would be no help for the auto sector. While the budget only contains a modest amount for them, at least the minister has flip-flopped on this important subject. Perhaps in the future he will consider devoting more money to help this sector overcome the challenges of a high dollar.

In a perfect world the government should not have to intervene in such a way, but this is far from a perfect world when it comes to other governments protecting their homegrown industries. Governments around the world spend billions of dollars ensuring their countries have a thriving and competitive aerospace sector. We do as well here in Canada, and that is a good thing. Without that government help, Canada would not have an aerospace industry.

However, the auto industry is no different. Our neighbours to the south have been busy giving big money to open new car plants across the states, particularly in the southern states. There is no reason that we should simply let our auto jobs flow south because we are ideologically opposed to any kind of government participation or intervention. The budget gives the first indication that maybe the finance minister is beginning to understand this fact.

The Budget

I will admit there were a few surprises in this budget that caught me a little off guard. For example, in the House, I have often raised the issue of the ecoAuto feebate program, introduced in budget 2007, and the chaos it has caused among Canadian auto manufacturers. There was a mention that this program was perhaps designed with good intentions, but was so poorly designed and executed that it threw our entire auto sector into total disarray. Civil servants at both the Department of Transport and the Department of Finance vigorously opposed the program for not being cost effective and being something that would result in an increased regulatory burden, without having much effect on reducing CO₂ emissions. The public servants, however, were ignored in the interests of something the government thought would be politically advantageous.

Car manufacturers were incensed with the seemingly random cut-off lines, which were perhaps picked out of a hat. Vehicle winners and losers were chosen without any consultation with the auto industry, leaving auto manufacturers completely incapable of designing cars that met the program requirements. Honda even mused publicly that the Honda Fit would qualify for the rebate if it lowered the weight of its vehicle by removing some of the additional safety features they offered such as multiple air bags. Thankfully it did not come to that. This year's budget eliminates the program, which was described by *The Globe and Mail* as follows:

While it is never a good idea to complicate the tax system with targeted breaks, this feebate debacle is a particularly sad indictment of...[the] instincts [the Minister of Finance] and of his bureaucrats' waning clout.

As I have described, there are several things in this budget with which I can agree. Another example is the pre-tax paid savings plan, which is not a bad idea, although lower income Canadians will have a difficult time taking advantage of it. However, if this savings plan is intended to honour the government's promise on capital gains during the last election, then it must be judged an abject failure.

The government promised to eliminate any capital gains tax incurred by a Canadian, so long as the profits of that sale were reinvested within a six month time frame. Most experts pointed out that this was almost a de facto elimination of the capital gains tax and that the Conservatives' costing of the initiative was grossly underestimated. I pointed out at the time that the complexity of following investment dollars through potentially dozens of investments over several decades would be a nightmare for the Canada Revenue Agency, and others suggested it was impossible.

Yesterday, when the finance minister tabled his third budget, it became more than evident that the capital gains pledge had sufficiently joined the ranks of other broken campaign promises, such as the promise never to tax income trusts.

● (1530)

There are, however, some other things for which I must take the government to task. Critical areas mainly involving social justice or support for disadvantaged Canadians are largely or totally absent. Among other areas, I refer to support for aboriginal Canadians, social housing, early learning and child care, the homeless, as well as a meaningful attack on poverty.

While all these areas are important to Liberals, our single most important commitment is that we will never again return to deficit. The speed with which a Liberal government would implement any or

all of these commitments would depend on the state of the government's finances and our commitment to stay in the black and pay down debt.

The promise to create a crown corporation to manage the EI fund has potentially far-reaching consequences and the implications of the proposal remain unclear.

As our leader has indicated, the Liberals would have paid down \$3 billion of debt this year, rather than \$10 billion, and we would have committed the remaining \$7 billion as a down payment on Canada's massive infrastructure deficit, our crumbling bridges, roads filled with potholes, inadequate public transit, border infrastructure and Atlantic and Pacific gateways. This would have represented a major investment in future generations, every bit as important as paying down the debt. The budget instead devotes a paltry \$0.5 billion dollars rather than \$7 billion to infrastructure.

One could find another broken promise on page 17 of the last Conservative election platform in which the Conservatives promised to pay down a minimum of \$3 billion of debt every year. Yet we have a budget that pledges to pay down only \$2.2 billion of debt this year and \$1.3 billion of debt next year. As the Canadian Taxpayers Federation pointed out yesterday, "Gone is the promise to pay down debt by \$3-billion a year". This broken promise should worry Canadians even more than the first because it shows how close to deficit this government is willing to skate.

When the previous government was in power, it maintained a \$3 billion contingency fund that was budgeted to deal with unforeseen events over the course of the year. Whether that was a natural disaster, or a dramatic slow down in the economy, an ice storm, SARS crisis, or 9/11, the previous government was always prepared to deal with whatever was thrown its way, without returning to deficit. With this budget, however, there is no contingency reserve and the government finds itself perilously close to deficit for the first time in more than a decade.

Just how close are we? Consider the fact that less than four months ago the Finance Minister delivered a fiscal update that projected Canada's gross domestic product would grow by 2.4% in 2008. Yesterday he downgraded that forecast to 1.7% growth. If in a few months from now it turns out the minister was once again wrong by the same amount, then that alone is enough to give the country a slight deficit this year and a bigger deficit next year.

That is not my prediction, this is simply a matter of running the Finance Minister's own numbers through the formula he has provided in his budget under the headline, "Sensitivity of the Budget Balance to Economic Shocks". Essentially Canada is now a SARS crisis away from deficit, or a mild American recession away from going back into deficit.

How did we get to this point? A brief look at Canada's recent fiscal history is in order.

The Budget

When the previous government came to power in 1993, the *Wall Street Journal* was boldly predicting that Canada was on the verge of becoming a third world economic basket case because, despite having promised to do so, Brian Mulroney's Conservative government had failed to make a dent in the federal deficit. Luckily for Canadians, the Liberal Party, Canada's true party of fiscal prudence, came to power in 1993 and by 1997 Jean Chrétien and his finance minister, the right hon. member for LaSalle—Émard, had eliminated a \$42 billion annual deficit.

• (1535)

[Translation]

On both sides of the border, history has shown that it is the Conservatives and the Republicans that run huge deficits, leaving the Liberals and Democrats to clean up the mess.

In the United States, Ronald Reagan's supply side economics led to record deficits in the 1980s, while Bill Clinton managed to generate an uninterrupted series of surpluses in the 1990s. Under Republican George W. Bush, the United States is again running up huge deficits and it will be up to the next president and Congress to clean up the mess.

In Ontario, the Eves government, including three ministers in the current federal government, campaigned on a balanced budget in 2003. However, when Dalton McGuinty won the election and brought in the auditors, he found that his Conservative predecessor had instead left him with a deficit of \$5.6 billion.

An hon. member: No.

An hon. member: Who was it?

Hon. John McCallum: I am not allowed to name him, but he is a well known member in this House who is currently the Minister of Finance.

Many Canadians will no doubt be surprised to learn that it is the Prime Minister's Conservatives, and not the Liberals, who are the biggest spenders.

Since the Conservatives came to power two years ago, federal program spending by the Prime Minister's government has increased by 6.4% compared to only 2.3% during the 13 years of Liberal reign. If we exclude years when there was a deficit, and tabulate only the eight years between 1997 and 2005, we arrive at an increase in program spending of 5.5% per year under the Liberals.

As Andrew Coyne of the *National Post* said when speaking of the Minister of Finance—and Andrew Coyne is not a Liberal to the best of my knowledge:

He [the Minister of Finance] has become the biggest spending finance minister in the history of Canada. It is an unfortunate but deserved reputation because Canada's new government has grown by 14% after two [name of the minister of finance] budgets .

While the Conservatives have generally spent more, this has not prevented them from making some foolish cuts, such as those in sectors that help Canada's competitiveness—for example, funding for universities—in sectors facing serious difficulties—for example, the Liberal forestry program—and, even worse, those affecting vulnerable populations—for example, programs targeting women and literacy programs.

• (1540)

[English]

We in the Liberal Party do not think this is a good budget. Nor do we think it is an egregiously bad budget. Therefore, we do not propose to bring down the government on this budget and to cause an election at this time, which, in our view, Canadians would not see as justified by a big expenditure over such a little budget.

What I find most disturbing in the budget is the fact that the government inherited the largest surplus in Canadian history a short two years ago. Now, through reckless overspending and economic management, which could only be described as in the style of the New Democratic Party, it has found itself with a fiscal cupboard that is largely bare and only a relatively mild SARS crisis or modest U.S. recession away from once more taking our country into deficit.

We are not voting on that issue. We do not think the budget is worthy of an election. However, I can assure members that we in the Liberal Party will be closely monitoring the fiscal management carried out by the government during these uncertain economic times.

[Translation]

I therefore move, seconded by the member for Hull—Aylmer:

That the motion be amended by deleting all of the words after the word “That” and by substituting the following therefor:

this House recognizes that this Budget contains some initiatives that attempt to mirror sound and intelligent Liberal policy proposals, but regrets that the government has made significant economic policy mistakes over the past two years and shown an NDP-like lack of fiscal prudence that prevent it from dealing with a downturn in the Canadian economy.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The amendment is in order.

On questions and comments, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

Hon. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary for Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a big smile on my face with that rather cute amendment the Liberals have proposed, because of course they have put the poison pill into it so that the NDP, presumably, will not be voting for it, although I happen to agree that the NDP members would not know a good financial statement if they saw one.

Nonetheless, that poison pill will reach that point. As my friend from Kings—Hants has noted, I am being somewhat cynical. I am sorry that I am being cynical, but clearly that is the poison pill, which was put in there intentionally.

However, I do have some good quotes. Carole Taylor, British Columbia's finance minister, said, “We were pleased with the tax cuts as announced in the fall so we are pleased to see them in the budget”. The minister, she said, “is continuing his agenda of trying to be a low-tax country”.

The Budget

Brad Wall, Saskatchewan's premier, said, "This is a good federal budget in terms of first steps toward achieving a new partnership with the...government to achieve those goals provincially".

Manitoba's premier, who is a New Democrat, of course, said, "We're pleased that the capital depreciation for manufacturing equipment has been extended". He has other very positive comments, as do many people in the manufacturing and accounting sectors.

Therefore, speaking of cynical, I find the comments of the speaker to be very cynical in that he is attempting to position the Liberals as actually having a position. There is a lukewarm position. It is a lukewarm party that we face on the other side of the House. There is an injunction that seems to be a fairly common injunction among most human beings: when they get a mouthful of lukewarm water, they have a tendency to spit it out.

● (1545)

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, we can all find selective quotations, I suppose, but I read out a battery of quotes from people, including the president of Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, who is very angry with regard to this budget.

I was more positive toward this budget than he was, because I said that at least the Conservatives did something in principle. They did a flip-flop on direct support for manufacturing, but the amount was so small that the manufacturers and the industrialists feel they have been totally abandoned by this government. That is the truth of the matter, whatever few selective quotes the hon. member might be able to find.

Clément Gignac, a well-known economist from the Banque Nationale in Montreal, noted that this is just one further shock away from deficit, so there is a well-known economist from Quebec who certainly backed up my statement that this budget brings us one SARS crisis away from going back into the red.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have come up with an interesting but really flaky amendment. I say flaky because "there is no there there". It is hard for the Liberals right now, as I guess most of us appreciated Rick Mercer's video, which encapsulated where the Liberals are right now. They stood up, looked around and ran away.

This amendment shows that not only are they going to run away, but they are going to do it in a flaky way. They are going to say "if only the world was according to us, which by the way we have no opinion on". By way of saying that, they are saying that this budget is really good but not good and they are going to stand up for it but run away from it.

The Liberals have come up with an amendment that has absolutely no substance other than finger pointing. We have to ask the Liberals and the member for Markham—Unionville why, if they are so concerned about the fiscal framework of this country, they would not put an amendment forward that actually had substance.

Finally, if the Liberals are going to continue to do this kind of flaky thing, will they please just tell Canadians that they are not interested in being in opposition and get on with the job of getting out of the way?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, it is true that we are not interested in opposition except for the very short term. We are interested in forming the government. It is the NDP that at best is confined to permanent third party status in the opposition.

There are a couple of reasons why nobody in his right mind would take the NDP seriously on anything to do with budgets. First, thanks to the NDP vote on the budget some time ago, those members managed to kill child care, kill Kelowna and elect a Conservative government.

The second reason why NDP members do not deserve any notice whatsoever on matters budgetary is that they do not understand anything about economics. They criticize us for wanting lower corporate taxes. However, let me tell members that if there were ever an NDP government in Canada, which there never will be, corporate taxes would be lower than anywhere else in the world because all the corporations would leave. They would pay no taxes in Canada.

● (1550)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend my colleague for an excellent presentation and analysis on the budget.

I would like the hon. member to explain to us why it is that the Conservatives have been attacking the Liberals on debt. The fact is that Mulroney was in power in good economic times, but during those good economic times the Conservatives quadrupled the debt and could not balance the budget. Why could they not balance the budget in good economic times?

We have seen history repeat itself with the current finance minister. In 2006 he had a visionless budget and huge spending. Despite the fact that there was a surplus of \$17 billion, he saw a necessity to cut social spending by \$1 billion. It was a meanspirited and overtly ideological budget. Budget 2007 was an inflationary budget.

As for the NDP, I am sure my colleague's amendment irks the NDP because, as he rightly stated, the NDP members put the Conservatives in power by killing the Kelowna accord, Kyoto, et cetera.

Why do you think the Conservatives are so concerned about blaming us for deficits?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I want to remind the hon. member for Don Valley East to address questions and comments through the Chair, not directly to other members.

The hon. member for Markham—Unionville.

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question. How can a party pretend that it is the party of surpluses when history shows so convincingly that that is incorrect? Some of my friends on the other side do not care about history, but history is important because it tends to repeat itself.

In addition to the points made in my speech, I would just respond to my hon. friend by reminding the House that this tendency for Tory times to be tough times and for Tory times to be deficit times did not begin with Brian Mulroney.

The Budget

Let us ask the question. Before the current Prime Minister was the lucky inheritor of large Liberal surpluses, how far back in Canadian history do we have to go to find a Conservative government and prime minister that actually managed to balance the books, even for one year? We have to go back to the year the *Titanic* sank, 1912, to Sir Robert Borden. All of those post-1912 Conservative prime ministers ran nothing but deficits until the current incumbent inherited Liberal surpluses.

Those members seem to be unacquainted with our history. I consider it an honour or a privilege or perhaps at least a useful function to acquaint them with the fiscal history of our country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I may have only enough time for a comment.

I have been listening to my colleagues opposite, and it seems that they have forgotten entire eras, particularly the era of the Mulroney government and his minister of finance, Mr. Wilson. When they came to power, they had to borrow money to pay for the bare necessities because of the Liberals.

Fortunately for us, the Conservatives implemented two measures: the GST and free trade. Those two measures enabled Canada to eliminate the deficit. Unfortunately, the Liberals accumulated their surpluses by cutting health and education transfers. A hospital in Armagh is still closed because of the federal government's vicious cuts to provincial transfer payments. I am also thinking of sudden retirements. The former Liberal government's unpredictable cuts caught the provinces off guard.

Now, we have a responsible government that has resumed transfer payments to eliminate the fiscal imbalance and has also given tax breaks. My question for my colleague is this: why not support such a well-balanced budget?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Markham—Unionville has 30 seconds.

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, 30 seconds is not enough time to correct that account of the Mulroney period. Mulroney presided over two majority governments. He had no excuse for ending his two majority terms in office with a \$42 billion deficit. When the Liberals took over from Mr. Mulroney, who was in power for eight years, they had to take care of the deficit they inherited. He had no excuse for accumulating such a huge deficit in his eight years in office.

• (1555)

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today, in responding to the budget speech, I would have liked to be able to say that the government had listened to what we said. The Bloc members held consultations that took us to all parts of Quebec, where we met with unions, employers, municipal groups, individuals and community representatives. What we called for in the budget represented the consensus in Quebec.

Unfortunately, the Conservatives did not listen to that consensus, especially on the issue of using the current surplus for the budget. The government decided to continue taking a purely ideological approach and use more than \$10 billion to pay down the debt, even though money was urgently needed for the manufacturing and

forestry industries and to deal with issues such as equity for seniors, social housing and many other short-term emergencies. The Conservatives decided not to act on these issues.

The Bloc Québécois has therefore decided not to vote in favour of this budget. The leader of the Bloc Québécois was clear about this yesterday. However, our consolation is that our position reflects the consensus in Quebec.

This morning, in *La Presse*, Quebec's finance minister, Ms. Jérôme-Forget, had this to say about the Conservatives and the Minister of Finance:

The choices he made do not reflect Quebec's priorities.

...

I am disappointed, because he had a \$20 billion margin at a time when we are in the midst of an economic slowdown. We would have expected a greater effort to help older workers and the forestry and manufacturing industries in Quebec.

For his part, the leader of the ADQ, Mr. Dumont, who recently referred to himself as a friend of the current Prime Minister, had this to say:

The aid for economic sectors like forestry and manufacturing is not enough. I expected more.

He also said:

Post-secondary education still has not been dealt with. On the issue of the fiscal imbalance, there is a fly in the ointment, despite what Jean Charest thinks. Quebec needs another \$1 billion for education.

The leader of the Parti québécois, the sovereignist party in Quebec, has also taken a position. Sovereignists have long understood that the two-government system was not a system for the future for Quebec. We have to go and get the money that we would otherwise have had if we collected all the taxes we were responsible for. So sovereignty would be the best solution for Quebec. Ms. Marois said that the federal budget neglects Quebec. She said that the document presented by Ottawa on Tuesday contained measures that primarily favoured the energy sector in western Canada, where the highest economic growth rates have been seen. She criticized the failure to provide measures for workers, for the forestry and manufacturing sectors and for post-secondary education.

So when the Bloc members rise in this House to say that the budget the Conservatives have introduced in no way meets the expectations of Quebecers, that is not just the position of the Bloc members, it is not just the position of our sympathizers and people who support us, it is the position of all parties in the National Assembly of Quebec. The three parties represented in the National Assembly of Quebec—the party in government, the official opposition and the third party—are all saying the same thing: this is a budget that was written for Ontario and the West, that was written to allow for nuclear power production to be started back up. Unbelievable!

The decision was made to target economic development efforts to the auto industry, which is located almost exclusively in Ontario, and none of the same benefits were given to other manufacturing industries and the forestry industry, which has been hard hit by the crisis.

The Budget

Very recently, in my riding, in Saint-Pamphile, the Maibec company closed down. It was a very well managed business, which cut American lumber and had good market penetration. Now it is just about finished, because this government has not been persuaded to put positive measures in place to assist Quebec.

One of the things that the Bloc Québécois has called for, all of which are just as relevant today, is a fund to establish Technology Partnerships Canada. What has the answer been? A fund for the auto industry in Ontario, but no identical fund for Quebec. The decision to eliminate that fund has been maintained, and the initiative and innovation we had hoped to see for our regions have been killed.

• (1600)

There were also calls for refundable contributions to businesses for buying new equipment totalling \$1.5 billion, money that could have been taken out of the \$10 billion surplus. Instead, we are going to pay down the debt. The ratio between Canada's debt and its gross domestic product is already one of the best among the G-7 members. But in spite of that, no investment is being made where funds are needed to give our businesses a chance to be competitive.

I will say it and keep saying it: this is not a question of subsidizing business, it is a question of giving them a chance to get the equipment that they need in order to be competitive, to get contracts and to provide products that will find buyers and that will get market share. These kinds of measures have not been proposed. Instead, they have decided to put that money into paying down the debt. They have decided to reduce Canada's debt, and therefore thousands of jobs will continue to disappear. Already, 150,000 jobs in the manufacturing sector have been lost in the last five years.

Already at the time of the Economic Statement last fall, we were telling the minister about the reality out there. However he already had his rose-coloured glasses firmly in place and was saying that things were going very well and growth would be over 3%. Yesterday, he was forced to say that the growth rate would fall to 1.8%, and he was not even sure about that. While growth declines, he goes on behaving a bit like the government in power before the great depression.

Not many people in the House will remember personally, but history tells us that, before 1930, the government in power in the United States tried to spend as little as possible and limit its outlays in order to pay off the debt as soon as possible. The country sank deeper and deeper into the depression at a time when they should have been taking measures like those introduced later by Franklin D. Roosevelt. It was his New Deal that turned the economy around.

We should learn from history. We should be able to understand things like that. There is a \$10 billion surplus this year. Even if another \$3 billion were spent on paying down the debt, enough would be left to provide the necessary assistance and still have a balanced budget. We would not have this artificial situation the government is creating. It is paying down the debt this year while not entirely sure that there will be a surplus at all next year. If it decided instead to invest this year, it would have a lot more revenues in the years to come.

The Bloc's position is also Quebec's position. It is Quebec's position in regard not only to the manufacturing and forestry sectors but also to how we treat the most disadvantaged people in society.

As we know, a terrible injustice was done in regard to the guaranteed income supplement. For years, the federal government deliberately saw to it that as few older people as possible got the guaranteed income supplement because those who were eligible were not automatically registered. There were 280,000 older people in Canada who were not registered, including 70,000 in Quebec. A huge amount of pressure was applied, especially by a former Bloc member, Mr. Gagnon. He worked tremendously hard to reduce this number.

The legislation is designed in such a way that when money is owed to older people under the guaranteed income supplement program, the maximum retroactive period is 11 months, but when a taxpayer has problems, the tax authorities can go back forever and collect money that was owing from the last four, five or ten years. When money is owed to older people, there is no full retroactivity. In our view, the Conservative government should have fixed this injustice.

These are the kinds of choices that figure among Quebec's values. We clearly want to share the wealth. Instead, we are treated to what seems a rather squalid gesture on the part of the Conservative government.

In yesterday's budget, older people, people aged 66 or 70 or 72 or 74, were told that if they wanted a bit more money so they could make ends meet, they could go to work and earn up to \$3,500 a year, and the money would not be applied against their guaranteed income supplement. Think about it a minute: in a village in my riding, or in a neighbourhood in Montreal, having to tell people who are 68 or 70 or 72 years old and who have worked all their lives, or a retired senior couple, that they are going to have to go out and earn extra money. Obviously, these people will not be earning high wages and they could be taken advantage of. They will have to go out and try to get jobs. This is a completely unrealistic approach.

And yet the federal government had ample resources to fix this injustice, by paying the guaranteed income supplement retroactively and increasing the amounts so that these people could get just above the poverty line. That would have provided them with the minimum income to be able to meet their basic needs.

In Quebec, in Canada and in our society, one of the richest societies on the planet, it is absolutely unacceptable that we do not give our seniors this kind of treatment.

• (1605)

That is what the Bloc Québécois would have hoped for, and what it will continue to stand up for until it wins and these seniors can get respect in this society. They have certainly earned it: they have worked all their lives. And this is something we will have to win, at the end of the day.

The Bloc made its positions very clear in advance. We said that if the government did not listen to us, we were prepared to vote against the budget and go to the polls. We are still ready; there is no problem.

The Budget

We hope that justice will be done for our industries, our older workers and our senior citizens, as quickly as possible.

Let us talk about older workers, for example. Do you know how much it cost so that these workers, who are 56 or 58 years old and who cannot find jobs despite their best efforts, could have some support while waiting for their old age pension? It cost \$60 million a year. During that time, this year, \$10 billion is being put toward the debt. But we are unable to provide fair treatment for people who have worked 25 or 30 or 35 years in a company, and who have paid taxes and employment insurance premiums.

The Conservatives are following the same reasoning when it comes to both older workers and senior citizens, in terms of the guaranteed income supplement: they are trying as hard as they can to create a cheap labour pool, people who will work for nothing. Because if you are 58 years old and you have found nothing, and ultimately you are receiving social assistance, then you are going to be tempted to work under the table to make ends meet.

This is the government's responsibility. If a society is capable of creating wealth and handing out very large tax cuts to business, tax cuts that will total huge amounts of money in the next few years, that is fine. If we are able to do that, we should be able to make sure that we are treating these people fairly.

The Bloc Québécois takes a responsible approach to this issue. It recommended partial payment of the debt and measures to use this year's surplus, and it made proposals that would still have provided for a balanced budget next year. The federal government did not honour that wish.

There are reasons why, unfortunately, we are faced with the current situation. One of those reasons is that the Liberal Party has been unable to define its position, the position of the official opposition, and to make demands to force the government to act. On the contrary, today, the Liberals introduced some kind of an amendment. So, even though they claim that the budget is uninspiring, they will not take their responsibilities and they are going to let the government continue to do as it pleases.

Today, a federal Liberal or Conservative candidate in Quebec must feel very much alone and terribly lonely. The position of the Liberal Party of Canada and that of the Conservative Party are identical, in that they are irresponsible in light of Quebec's needs. Quebeckers will remember that, and they will make those parties pay the price at the next general election. Indeed, we absolutely cannot accept that elected members, who said they would look after Quebec's interests, come in this House and suddenly agree to support a budget that does not meet Quebec's needs in any way.

If Conservative and Liberal members from Quebec will not listen to Bloc members, then they should listen to what the Quebec Liberal Party's minister of Finance said in Quebec City, or to what the leader of the Action démocratique du Québec, Mario Dumont, who is a friend of the Conservatives, also said yesterday. They should listen to all the opinions that have been voiced. The Quebec federation of chambers of commerce said that, as regards the manufacturing sector, this budget makes no sense, that it is unacceptable. The whole union movement, which is a significant force in Quebec, also said that it is imperative the federal government realize that it has the

means to take action, and that, in this budget, it has really made its economic decisions with only the energy sector in mind.

Take a look at the budget papers. There is a nice table showing the link between the increase in the value of the dollar, and the increase in the value of oil. Next to it, another table shows the impact on the manufacturing sector. It is quite clear. This is what we are confronted with: On the one hand, the dollar is going up, because oil prices are increasing, while on the other hand the manufacturing sector is slowing down, because we are not as competitive. We have nothing against the economy being in good shape, against energy prices that are acceptable, but we must ensure that there is a redistribution to help spread and generate wealth.

● (1610)

It is the government's responsibility. This is a Quebec value that the Conservatives, unfortunately, do not seem to share and are not capable of supporting.

Our responsible position on the budget is based on broad consultations. We announced it very clearly yesterday and reiterated it today in question period.

To conclude, I want to make one last point before introducing an amendment to the amendment. The government still has time to change course. It has until March 31, 2008 to do what it did with the \$1 billion trust.

We all remember the Prime Minister saying that the billion dollars would only be available if the budget was passed in full. There was such an outcry in Quebec because this did not make any sense that we succeeded in forcing the Prime Minister to change course. He agreed to separate the billion dollars from the passage of the budget. The billion dollars are therefore available.

This shows that it is quite possible to do things without tying them to the passage of the budget. It was possible before the budget was tabled and will still be possible for this year's surpluses until March 31.

I hope the Prime Minister will listen to the consensus in Quebec. There is still a consensus on the family trust issue. All three parties in the National Assembly agree. The labour unions and employers associations in Quebec all agree, as do the various social strata. There is a consensus in all parts of Quebec, where people want senior citizens treated fairly again, a decent future for our regions, and all parts of Quebec occupied through our forestry and manufacturing sectors. This is the consensus that the Bloc members champion in the House. It is why we will vote against the budget and introduce an amendment to the amendment.

With the support of the hon. member for Montcalm, I move the following amendment to the amendment:

That all the words after the word "contains" be replaced by the following:

"initiatives that do not meet the expectations of Quebeckers who have asked that the current year's surpluses be used to help workers and industries in the manufacturing and forestry sectors, which are facing a serious crisis in Quebec, to help seniors living below the poverty line and help individuals improve the energy efficiency of their homes, calls on the government to implement these measures before the fiscal year ending on March 31, 2008, and deplors that this Budget ignores the fiscal imbalance by not transferring \$3.5 billion to Quebec and the provinces for post-secondary education and by not eliminating federal spending power."

The Budget

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The amendment to the amendment is in order. The debate is now on the amendment to the amendment.

The hon. member for Lévis-Bellechasse has the floor, for questions or comments.

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the arguments presented by the member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, and I also listened to him when he quoted the Prime Minister and the leader of the official opposition from Quebec. I wish to remind him that these two leaders also said that the Bloc Québécois had yet to produce any concrete result in the House of Commons.

In his arguments, the member used the term “ignoble” in French, or despicable. Could he tell me what he finds despicable?

For example, we on this side of the House proposed a tax relief of \$140 billion for families and seniors. In fact, 70% of the tax breaks provided by the Conservative government are for families and seniors.

So, what is despicable? It is to vote against this measure, or to support it, as we, on this side of the House, are doing?

The member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup also talked at length about the manufacturing sector. It goes without saying that the manufacturing sector plays a key role in my riding, and some companies are leaders. Everyone is very proud of that and, indeed, these companies make Quebeckers proud. However, now they need to invest, and they need a government that is going to create an environment that will allow them to become world class businesses.

So, what is despicable? Is it to remain sitting on one's hands when the time comes to lower taxes, when the time comes to provide an accelerated capital cost allowance to help these companies invest in their equipment? Let us take a look at what we, on this side of the House, are doing with the measures that were proposed yesterday. There is still time for the hon. member to change his mind. We are investing \$1 billion to allow companies to benefit from the accelerated capital cost allowance, in addition to earmarking \$440 million for innovation.

I could go on and on, but I think there is one initiative that will be of particular interest to the hon. member. I am asking him to reconsider his position. There is still time for him to change his mind. We are creating an independent body to oversee the employment insurance account. Does the hon. member support the establishment of an independent body to manage workers' money—

• (1615)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. I am sorry to have to interrupt the hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse. The hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question, because it really is a question about employment insurance. It is the Bloc Québécois that put the issue of an independent fund on the agenda. We asked for such a fund for many years, but what we did not ask for, and what the Conservatives are currently doing, is to

make it legal to steal \$54 billion that has been paid by unemployed people, employers and workers. The \$54 billion that—

Mr. Steven Blaney: You did nothing.

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague while he asked his question and I would ask him to listen to my response.

The government has decided to keep the \$54 billion for itself and use it to pay down Canada's deficit, use that money to pay down the deficit. The only people who saw no return on their investment were the unemployed workers, the seasonal workers in your riding, people from Bellechasse, from my riding and from across Canada, who earn modest salaries and who have never been given their fair share.

It is as if the government had taken \$500 from them and was asking them now if they are happy to be getting \$25 back. No, they are not happy. They will stand their ground and, eventually, the money will successfully be returned to the workers, those who paid into the fund and the unemployed who sacrificed to have insurance.

I will wrap up quickly. Speaking of despicable things, it is despicable that the Conservative government requires people who are 68, 70 or 72 years old and who are eligible for the guaranteed income supplement to earn an income of \$3,000, instead of giving them the monthly \$100 they deserve after having been on the labour market for 30 years of their lives. That is what is despicable.

[English]

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we in the New Democratic Party recognize that the budget follows the mini-budget in November. That is when the real errors of the government took place in making such extreme cuts to the tax regime on which the government operates. Now we are faced with a future of fiscal uncertainty in the country.

Does my hon. colleague not agree with me that there really is no way to fix this other than to move on to an election and replace the government? We could possibly get some changes in the House of Commons and we could restore the required tax regime to run the country in a proper fashion.

• (1620)

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Speaker, I wished we did not have to go to the polls to convince people of the need to apply the current year surplus to revitalizing the economy and ensure there is enough money left next year for wealth to be distributed. That is the mistake the Conservatives are making in this year's budget. They are obsessed with debt reduction. They are like the homeowner bent on paying off his mortgage within five years who is failing in the future and in innovation instead of putting \$10 billion toward the debt, which we are already reducing at a proper education.

To allow people to compete and our children to get a good education, we would have liked money to be put back into post-secondary education. There has been a fiscal imbalance in that area since 1994-95, which was never fixed. We have to invest in the future and in innovation instead of putting \$10 billion toward the debt, which we are already reducing at a very acceptable rate.

The Budget

This kind of ideological choice does not meet in any way the needs of Quebec, nor those of Canada for that matter. Society has to be sufficiently productive and our fellow citizens have to be well trained in order to support their families in the future.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the budget was analysed by everyone—the various political parties, analysts and journalists. This morning I was reading an article by a journalist who stated that the budget document confirms the philosophical, if not ideological, shift imposed on the federal administration by the Conservatives since last October's economic statement. That is also the case with this budget.

I would like to ask a question of my colleague who, as the critic, is very acquainted with this file and has demonstrated much more insight in his analysis of the budget. Why is it that for years certain segments of the population were left out in the cold by the Liberals? They made cuts in all areas—in the social safety net and in Canadian social transfers. This is being repeated, although they are going about it in a slightly more subtle way.

Why was this budget not well received by the various political leaders in Quebec? I would like my colleague to explain to those listening today why certain groups have been completely ignored by this budget.

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Speaker, my colleague's point of view is a very interesting one. Indeed, it is quite surprising to see the Liberal Party join the government by supporting this budget. This whole charade, this dilly-dallying shows that the Liberals really think like the Conservatives regarding this budget. It is somewhat like the issue of Afghanistan. Originally, they felt that Canada had to leave by 2009; now, they are agreeing to our leaving in 2011, and they may eventually agree on an even later date.

The real solution to this issue for Quebeckers will come when we are able to make our own decisions alone, with our own taxes and with full control over our participation in international agreements or assistance projects. That is what we call sovereignty.

We will then be able to make choices that are different. Canada will also be able to make its own choices. It may decide to make war wherever it wants. As for Quebec, it will be able to make different choices, if it deems appropriate to do so. It will no longer be forced to come here to beg for money that comes from its own taxes, and that is spent based on a Canada-wide vision of the economy, a vision that is not the same as that of Quebec. We must first leave that structure, and then we will become two neighbours living side by side.

Quebec will, at last, have all the tools to make its own decisions. It will no longer have to convince the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party, or any government formed by these parties, of anything. We will be able to make our own decisions, since we will have all the powers, and we will also assume full responsibility for those decisions. This will allow us to ensure the future of America's only French community.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Hull—Aylmer, Election financing.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Outremont.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to inform you that I intend to share my time with my colleague, the member for Parkdale—High Park.

It is often said that a picture is worth a thousand words when it comes to illustrating a point. For the people listening to us today, I would say that they are going to find a picture that is worth a thousand words, when it comes to the intentions of the extreme right-wing Conservative Party government, when they read Table 5.4 in the budget. It is on page 217 of the French version, and is accessible on line. For people who prefer, the same table appears on page 201 of the English version. It is worth taking a look at. It offers a perfect illustration of the gulf that separates the New Democratic Party from the ideology-driven government we see in the present Conservative government.

Let us look at what is in front of us. Here we are in February 2008. So next month, at the end of March, we will be finishing what is called the 2007-08 fiscal year. We are presented with all sources of revenue, of budgetary revenues. For personal income tax—tax paid by people, by individuals—the figure for 2007-08 is \$112 billion. Two years from now, for the 2009-10 fiscal year, it will be up to \$125 billion, which is a 12% increase. On the next line, we see corporate income tax—tax paid by corporations, by companies, here in Canada. For the same period, we see \$42 billion today, but that goes down to \$36 billion for 2009-10—a 14% reduction.

That shows, and how well it shows, the difference between the Conservatives and our party, because this little present that the Conservatives are handing to the most profitable corporations will be paid for by families in Quebec and Canada. That is the simple reality of it.

A budget is a reflection of a series of choices. The choices the Conservatives have made are summed up extraordinarily well in what I have just quoted.

What has happened in the last year for us to get to this point? It is not complicated. This fall, the Conservatives, with their usual fanfare, announced that they had found the solution to the hundreds of thousands of jobs being lost in the forestry and manufacturing sectors. They were going to give out \$14 billion in tax cuts. Well, there is one little problem for our Conservative friends, who make themselves out to be big experts on the economy. Most of these corporations did not make a profit last year, for the simple, good reason that after the government put all its eggs in the oil sands basket, the loonie soared to heights never before seen, making it increasingly difficult to export forestry products and manufactured products. The more the Canadian dollar is worth, the harder it obviously is to export.

So where have these so-called tax reductions to help the manufacturing sector and forestry industry companies gone? They have all gone to the most profitable sector: the big oil companies, the most polluting companies—the biggest polluters—and the banks, which are already making stupendous profits.

The Budget

Indeed, the Conservative government is completely unable to stand up to the banks and to demand reasonable interest rates for credit cards or the end of customer abuse with automatic teller machines. The poor unfortunate Minister of Finance was seen begging the banks for a little relief in automatic teller machine fees. He was greeted with a sharp no and just left. He does not get it that he is the one giving the orders, not the banks. But if you are a Conservative government, receiving orders from the banks is something you accept.

This is also the matter of equity between generations. The 350,000 jobs—yes, you heard me right—the 350,000 well-paid jobs which vanished from the manufacturing sector in the past five years often had conditions of employment which were sufficient for a family to live a decent life. Those employees often had a pension plan with their jobs.

•(1625)

If you want an image—which people in Quebec will immediately understand—to better understand the change, just drive along the autoroute des Laurentides and take a look where, a while ago, there was a huge GM plant. Today, all you see there are shopping centres. You cannot raise a family selling clothing for \$10 an hour. The problem is even more acute for future generations, for which a solution will have to be found sooner or later, since they obviously do not have any pension plan nor any other fringe benefit worthy of the name.

I listened very carefully to the hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse holding forth a little while ago against what the Bloc had to say. I would like to take the unusual step of giving a colleague a bit of advice: he should update his CV. Speaking about sustainable development, there is a project that is very dear to him and that he supports and proposes: the Rabaska project for a methane terminal in Lévis. What is also very interesting is that his colleague from the Beauce thinks it is too dangerous to have methane tankers crossing between New Brunswick and Maine. He came out with some criticism of it during the summer. A study has been done on the safety of this, but no serious, in-depth studies have ever been done on the safety of the Rabaska project, a methane terminal located very close to the population centres of Lévis and Quebec City.

Last Saturday, the NDP introduced Denis L'Homme, a former associate deputy energy minister in Quebec at the Ministère des Ressources naturelles, who is highly respected in his field and among his peers. He could tell the temporary Conservative member for Lévis—Bellechasse a thing or two about sustainable development and what it means to think about the effect on future generations when decisions are made involving environmental, economic and social factors—something that the Conservatives seem singularly incapable of doing.

The headline in today's *Toronto Star* was very telling.

•(1630)

[*English*]

It is worth drawing people's attention to a title in today's *Toronto Star*, that it is a show about nothing, "Devoid of big ideas beyond a tax-free savings account, [the minister's] low-key plan looks likely to keep the Tories in office". The only reason it is going to keep the

Tories in office is because the Liberals are going to keep them in office.

This is the supposed official opposition. It loves calling itself the government-in-waiting. It is going to wait a long time and it is going to wait to be replaced as the official opposition in the next election, and I will the House why. It is because it is the weakest opposition party ever to have sat in the House of Commons. It is an embarrassment. Many of the members who are going to be told to sit on their hands do not want to do it. This was once a party that had ideas. It no longer has.

Today, we are going to be looking at some amendments. One of the amendments has been put in place by the Liberals, which is obviously not something that seeks to gain a great deal of support. They do not want to bring the government down. They are terrified of an election.

[*Translation*]

I should say as well that the Bloc's amendment to the amendment surprised me a little because there are several things on which they could have achieved a consensus if they had only wanted. It would have been easy to find things on which everyone could agree.

For them to finish by saying they want simply to eliminate the federal spending power without specifying the federal spending power in areas of provincial jurisdiction was a transparent attempt, in our view, to ensure that the consensus of the three opposition parties needed to defeat the government could never be achieved.

We in the NDP are not afraid of our ideas or of defending them. The New Democratic Party has proudly introduced ideas as important as free universal health insurance for all Canadians. We will continue to champion ideas like this. But when we see a budget that has nothing on health, housing and families and gives everything to big corporations, we know exactly what to do: we will stand and vote against it.

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the remarks of my colleague from Outremont. I would like to thank him for his interest in the wonderful riding of Lévis—Bellechasse which, to me, has to be the most beautiful in Canada.

With respect to the methane terminals, I would like to remind him that the largest organization of environment professionals in the country, namely RÉSEAU environnement, has recognized that establishing a methane terminal was consistent with a sustainable development strategy. That is something that can certainly be argued. At any rate, ideas need to be tossed around and a diversity of views is a good thing if we want to move forward and see our country become a leader in sustainable development.

I would like to come back to the budget. I have an interesting question for the member. This budget is providing for nearly \$140 billion in tax relief for families and seniors. The member purports to stand for the working masses. How is it then that he does not support a budget designed to create a climate in which wealth can be better distributed? Indeed, we are allowing our manufacturers to expand by investing in equipment and basically fostering the emergence of companies across the country.

The Budget

I would really like to hear him on that because, in Quebec, the economy is not doing too poorly. There have been 150,000 net new jobs created since our government took office. I would be curious to hear his views on the matter and I would like him to comment.

•(1635)

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, it is quite something to hear the hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse defend the methane port project as sustainable development. The proposal is absurd. The risks of this project are known. If the hon. member is interested, he should go to Boston and talk to the coast guard, as I have had the opportunity to do.

Let us come back to the second part of his intervention when he talked about sharing the wealth. I invite him to consult what I was referring to earlier to convince him. On page 201 of the budget plan, table 5.4, the distribution of wealth he is talking about consists of taking money out of the pockets of individuals and giving it to corporations that are making the highest profits in Canada. The biggest polluters will receive money from individuals. In the meantime, for affordable housing in Lévis and elsewhere, there is nothing. To hire new doctors to help provinces in their jurisdiction of health, there is nothing. There is nothing interesting in this budget for the people.

There is indeed something in the budget for the existing infrastructure plan, but much more is needed. The deficit is in the order of \$123 billion. It has come to that because successive Conservative and Liberal governments ran such high deficits here that in order to get back on track they had to offload expenses to the provinces. Nonetheless, there is nothing magical about this. Infrastructure that is crumbling needs to be maintained in the long term. Even if responsibility is shifted from one party to another, in the final analysis the only thing that accomplishes is passing the buck from the federal to the provincial level, then to the municipal level and then to the property tax bill for individual homes and real estate.

[*English*]

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 2005 the New Democratic Party stopped the last corporate tax cut that was proposed by the Liberals at the time. Since then, corporations have done fairly well in Canada.

In that period, following the failure to cut corporate taxes, did we see a downturn in the economy? Did we see any corporations that were particularly hurting, or did we see many of them having record profits at that time?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, the answer for my colleague is no, there was no problem. Quite the contrary, employment statistics showed that we continued to have a quite robust economy in Canada. The choices made in a budget are, in the final analysis, societal choices. What do we want to do in this country with all this wealth?

Canada is a wealthy country in every sense of the word. We have abundant natural and human resources, but we are also blessed by nature. Water is part of our wealth. Mines which can be found anywhere are part of our wealth. Forests are part of our wealth, but are often abused.

Nevertheless, we, in the New Democratic Party, have always advocated the use of this wealth for the people, and not for the structures.

[*English*]

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Outremont for sharing his time with me today.

I am very pleased to speak to the budget tabled yesterday by the government.

Budgets are about priorities. Budgets are about choices. Budgets define governments. Budgets are about how to use the resources that we all contribute to make our country and the world a better place.

For too many years, budget after budget, even with record surpluses, we have been left with a smallness, a stinginess in our budgets and therefore in our society. People now know that after years of tax cuts mainly favouring large corporations and the well-off, we face huge challenges in our society that governments have not addressed. We have huge unmet needs, yet we are offered a breathtaking lack of vision with the budget.

Once again, the opposition is sadly putting narrow, partisan self-interests over the good of our country. The Leader of the Opposition comes to Toronto and says some very nice sounding things about reducing poverty, but just like on his record with Kyoto, it is all meaningless. He and his party are supporting budget after budget and vote after vote that take the country in the wrong direction.

Today, Canadians are working longer and harder. More and more people are falling below the poverty level. Incomes are flat. Personal debt is at an all-time high. Seniors are struggling to stay in their homes. Students are starting out in life with a huge debt. Millions of Canadians have no family doctor.

What has the government done with its latest budget?

We know in broad strokes what it has done. We know that for every dollar it spends in programs and services and all the various things it includes in the budget, it spends \$6 for corporate tax cuts, \$6 to the big polluters, \$6 to the big banks and \$6 to its friends who are already make a lot of money.

What this means overall is average Canadians, people who work very hard, who pay their taxes and who want to see their money invested back into their communities, pay 12% more for the services that we all need and profitable corporations pay 14% less. There is something wrong with this picture, but the government's direction is clear.

It is not that people cannot find a sprinkling of money here or there in the budget, which they might like. It is that the government has shelved out most of the money to the big banks and the big polluters. It takes the country in the wrong direction. Canadians want environmental responsibility, not rewards for those who pollute without sanction.

What is left? What do we see in this budget? Let us take a look.

The Budget

To deal with the crisis in homelessness, what do we find in the budget? Every day I see people on the streets of Toronto. They are desperate to find proper shelter. A growing number of people are absolutely falling off the bottom of the economic ladder. There is nothing in the budget for them.

To deal with affordable housing, what do we find in the budget? Parents are struggling with high rents and minimum wage jobs, although the government will not support a national minimum wage. People are struggling with poverty level jobs and high housing costs. There is absolutely nothing in the budget for them.

What is in the budget to retrofit buildings, a major initiative to increase energy efficiently? There is nothing.

What about child care for all the parents who are struggling to get adequate care and a good start for their kids in life, for parents in my riding who are paying sometimes \$2,000 a month for a couple of kids in child care? There is absolutely nothing.

What about seniors who want to stay in their homes and are looking for home care? There is nothing.

What is there to clean up pollution in the great lakes? There is nothing.

What is there for the five million Canadians who cannot find a family doctor? There is nothing.

What about reducing wait times in the health care sector? There is nothing.

What about those who cannot afford the prescription drugs they desperately need? There is nothing in the budget for them.

What about culture, the stories that we tell each other, the images, the arts that define us as Canadians? There is nothing, not even a mention of art, in the entire budget.

• (1640)

What about climate change? There is nothing.

The biggest investment in the budget is \$350 million for nuclear development. That says it all. I believe the members opposite, the opposition who are supporting the budget, ought to be absolutely ashamed of themselves. They should not go back to Ontario and pretend to be standing up for Ontarians, pretending to be standing up for Toronto, pretending to be standing up for those less fortunate because they have betrayed them with the budget.

Rather than using our resources to give the big polluters or the big banks a big cheque, what people in my community tell me is that they desperately want to see money spent on infrastructure. They pay a lot of money in taxes and they want that money invested back into their communities in infrastructure, especially in a national transit strategy.

The gas tax transfer, which is a positive step, falls far short of beginning to address the decades of neglect in expanding our transit and fixing our infrastructure. There is no significant dent in the \$123 billion deficit in infrastructure. We know the government's plan, with its new crown corporation for public-private partnerships, is about privatizing as much profitable infrastructure as possible while

leaving citizens on the hook for any cost overruns. That is some partnership.

Toronto was Canada's big major cultural centre. Top-up funds for the big six cultural initiatives such as the opera, art gallery, after the community has raised so much of its own money, are missing. There is nothing for the television fund, nothing for Telefilm Canada. That is the government's vision for the arts, absolutely nothing, a blank.

Ontario is especially hard hit. The government continues to ignore the manufacturing crisis, which is throwing hundreds of thousands out of their jobs. Our government risks permanent damage to this key engine of our economy. A bit of money for auto, for research and development is not a strategy to help our manufacturers and exporters deal with the spiralling petrodollar in Canada.

Where is the plan to deal with the high dollar? Where is the national "buy Canadian" procurement policy that most other developed countries use to boost their local products? Where is the plan to balance our trade so we do not export all our good jobs? Where is the green job strategy? Where are we positioning Canada and our economy for the 21st century? Simply, we are not.

While Ontario faces a tsunami of job losses, we continue to be hammered by the lack of employment insurance for those who have faithfully paid their premiums.

Why do Ontarians get on average \$5,000 EI less than those in other parts of the country? Why do almost 80% of those who are unemployed in Toronto get no EI? What other insurance program takes one's premiums and fails to provide the benefits when disaster strikes? What a rip-off for Ontarians.

Creating a crown corporation for EI is the wrong approach. This will let government duck its responsibilities and public accountability. It continues the fine tradition of the previous government to take billions of premiums paid by workers and employers and use them to pay down the debt rather than provide benefits for those most in need.

Budgets are about priorities. They are not about what one says, they are about what one does. We know the priorities of the government are about downsizing, about getting out of services, about getting out of the things that Canada and Canadians care about most. It is about helping their friends, the big polluters and the big banks.

Again, those on the opposite side, in the opposition party, ought to be absolutely ashamed for allowing the Conservatives to take Canada in the wrong direction. They did it on Afghanistan by not only getting us into this combat mission, but then enabling the continuation of this war to 2009, and who knows for how long into the future, and they are doing it with this budget.

I regret the budget so badly fails Canadians. I will proudly join with other MPs of the NDP in standing by our principles, in standing up for Canadians and in opposing this budget.

The Budget

•(1645)

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the member for Parkdale—High Park. I remind the member that she went to the election in 2005 saying one thing, “Look what we got you. Lend us your vote and we will get you more”. People were unable to see through the smoke and mirrors at that time.

It struck a chord with me when she said that we had betrayed the seniors, the students, infrastructure money and so on. This might not be a good budget, and it is not, but there is some money in there for infrastructure for my city of Toronto. There is some money in there for education. It is not what it should be, but at least there is some money.

The Liberal Party will not betray Canadians, even if there is just a teeny bit in the budget, the way the NDP betrayed Canadians. Before the last election, there was \$1.6 billion for housing. There was money for education, for seniors, for international obligations and for the environment. The money was in place through the recommendations of the NDP. Then that party did an about-face and brought down the government prematurely.

What will the member for Parkdale—High Park say to her constituents when she goes to the polls? Is she going to tell them to lend the NDP their votes because it will lose them some more? That is what the NDP did in the last election. If anybody should be ashamed, it is the members of the NDP.

•(1650)

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, I remind the hon. member that there was no federal election in 2005 and that I was not elected until 2006.

I will also challenge the opposition that—

Mr. John Cannis: The budget was 2005. You betrayed Canadians.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. The hon. member for Parkdale—High Park can answer the question on her own, so if we can let her do that.

The hon. member for Parkdale—High Park.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, they doth protest too much.

I remember that the previous government, like the current government, was going down the path of shovelling huge corporate tax cuts to their friends, mainly in the oil and gas sector. This is in spite of all its red book promises, which are certainly a testament to its legacy of broken promises.

The NDP ensured that \$5.4 billion of those corporate tax cuts, rather than going into the pockets of the executives of those companies, would be invested in the community in housing, in transit, in students, so their tuition was reduced, and in foreign aid. That is the kind of negotiation around a budget that ought to be done.

The members opposite squandered that opportunity. They have basically sold their opposition to supporting a budget. What did they get for the budget? They got absolutely nothing.

The member opposite comes from Toronto. He ought to be ashamed of how the budget betrays the aspirations and the needs of the city of Toronto.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, back in the early 1990s, we had a serious recession in North America, and there are concerns that we may have a replay of that type of recession.

People in the province of Ontario elected a New Democrat government led by a fellow by the name of Bob Rae. What did Ontario get during that period? High taxes, big government, a huge massive deficit and a debt that was over \$100 billion. It tried to spend its way out of this thing with high taxes and massive spending and so on. Where did it get the NDP government?

If the NDP members had power or had some say in Parliament, is that the recipe they would use to try to deal with the situation we have to deal with today, and that is higher taxes, more spending, big deficits, try to spend their way into prosperity?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, despite the aberration of the government in Ontario, which is now the responsibility of the official opposition, given their candidates are these days, I remind the member that the NDP has a record of more balanced budgets in the country than any other political party.

The government has been shovelling taxpayer dollars out the door, and I remind him once again at a rate of six to one in the budget. Building on that, hundreds of billions of dollars have been made in tax cuts by the government, and the previous government, toward the most profitable corporations. By doing that, Canadians have been denied the services, the goods, the infrastructure and all the aspirations that they seek.

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are certainly hoping that we can bring back some reason to this debate. I appreciate the opportunity to rise in the House and make my remarks in support of budget 2008.

By the way, this is our third balanced budget. There were suggestions in the House earlier today that Conservatives do not know how to balance a budget. I would argue strongly that this finance minister has now tabled three balanced Conservative budgets in a row and we are looking forward to many more.

Of course, we would like to thank the Liberals in the House for recognizing the value of a balanced budget and realizing that this is good for Canadians and they are going to support us on this. We are looking forward to the day that we get this done and we can get on with other business that is so important to Canadians.

This budget builds on our government's solid record of fiscal management. Our responsible and prudent approach has served Canadians well. This approach has allowed us to be ahead of the curve while others are just now taking action.

We have made the broad-based long term tax reductions for Canadians, for both individuals and businesses alike, that are in place now, exactly when we need them. We have reduced record amounts of debt, we have controlled spending, and we have made the largest investment in public infrastructure in modern history.

The Budget

In budget 2008 we have built on that solid foundation. We are introducing a tax-free savings account to help Canadians save throughout their lifetimes and never pay tax on the earnings in or the withdrawals from these accounts.

We are providing additional support for manufacturers and processors. We are making our communities safer by putting more police on the street. We are taking additional steps to preserve Canada's environment and we are helping even more students excel. We are further protecting our seniors.

We are doing all of this with a steady hand on the tiller to guide us into the future with confidence.

As we all know the coming year brings with it growing concerns about the uncertainty and the volatility in the world economy. That brings with it a larger than expected slowdown in the United States and questions about the duration and the impact of ongoing financial market turmoil.

Fortunately, our government acted decisively with historic tax reductions that benefit Canadians right now. We could do this because our economic fundamentals remain strong. Our budget is better than balanced. It is in surplus. Unemployment is at its lowest point in 33 years. Inflation remains low and stable.

This all means that we can be confident in the Canadian economy. On that basis our government is keeping its promises to Canadians with actions to further our long term economic plan, "Advantage Canada". Our plan lays out five key advantages that will provide the groundwork for even greater prosperity for Canadian individuals, families and businesses. We are getting things done.

For example, we have made major progress in creating a tax advantage. In fact, we have provided relief in every way the government collects taxes: personal and business taxes, excise and consumption taxes, and the 2 percentage point reduction in the GST. Our government is giving Canadians the tax cuts they deserve, tax cuts that we promised and we have delivered.

With the \$60 billion of tax reductions announced in our fall economic statement, the total action taken by this government to date is approaching \$200 billion in tax cuts over this year and the next five years. What is more, we are bringing taxes to the lowest level in over 50 years and we will not stop there.

Taxes will continue to decline, thanks to our tax back guarantee, which guarantees that as we pay down the federal debt, interest savings are being returned to Canadians in personal income tax cuts.

•(1655)

We are reducing the federal debt by more than \$37 billion, including \$10.2 billion this fiscal year. As a result, by 2009-10, personal income tax reductions, provided under the tax back guarantee, will amount to \$2 billion. We have also committed to ongoing measured debt reduction in the face of global economic uncertainty. This government will not pass on to our children or grandchildren a debt from the excessive spending of past governments.

I am proud to say that our fiscal approach is paying off. This government's tax reductions mean more money for individuals,

families, workers and seniors to spend or invest as they see fit. This money can also be used to save for the future.

Budget 2008 takes action to build on the progress we have made in creating a Canadian tax advantage.

Saving money often can be difficult, especially for low and modest income Canadians. In budget 2008 we have made saving money easier with a new tax-free savings account. This account will generate tax-free income for life. The tax-free savings account will allow more money to grow and, as its name suggests, tax-free, and will remain tax-free when withdrawn. No catch, no small print.

Adult Canadians will be able to contribute up to \$5,000 every year to a registered account plus carry over unused amounts to future years. The great thing about this account is that it allows Canadians to save for whatever purpose they want, be it for home renovations, starting a small business, or a special vacation.

Most important, to make it easier for lower and modest income families to save there will be no clawbacks. That means that neither the income earned in the tax-free savings account nor the withdrawals from it will affect eligibility for federal income tested benefits such as the Canada child tax benefit, the GST credit, old age security or GIS benefits.

In the first five years it is estimated that over three-quarters of the benefits of savings in a tax-free savings account will go to individuals in the two lowest tax brackets. That is tax-free savings for Canadians. According to the *Globe and Mail*, "Savers and investors, meet your new best friend".

This government has not ignored Canada's thriving business community either. Our previous two budgets, the tax fairness plan and the 2007 fall economic statement took action to help our businesses compete in today's globally competitive marketplace.

Because we are committed to making Canada a great place to create and expand business, last fall we introduced a timely and decisive plan to reduce the federal corporate income tax rate to 15% by the year 2012. This bold initiative will give Canada the lowest overall tax rate on new business investment in the G-7 by 2010 and the lowest statutory tax rate among G-7 countries by 2012.

The Budget

Recently, with the community development trust, we acted in support of Canadian workers and their families. Manufacturers and processors are now benefiting from our accelerated capital cost allowance measure that allows manufacturing and processing businesses to writeoff investments in machinery and equipment over a two year period. This temporary measure creates an incentive to accelerate investment and will provide \$1.3 billion of assistance to this sector by 2009-10.

We have also increased capital cost allowance rates for manufacturing and other non-residential buildings and for computers to better reflect the useful life of those assets.

Now, in budget 2008 our government is going even further. We are providing an additional three years of accelerated capital cost allowance treatment for investment by manufacturers and processors in machinery and equipment. This initiative will provide manufacturers and processors with an additional \$1 billion in tax relief over the next five fiscal years.

Moreover, it will provide businesses in the manufacturing and processing sector with more time to accelerate their investments to better enable them to adjust to the current economic challenges.

●(1700)

Budget 2008 also contains initiatives that respond to the infrastructure advantage in our plan "Advantage Canada", further evidence that this government is following through on its long term commitments.

Now that they are in opposition, I am sure the hon. members across the floor would agree that in order to support our communities and ensure the competitiveness of the Canadian economy, Canada needs access to modern infrastructure, though as government they largely ignored that problem for 13 years.

Our government, through our building Canada plan, is making the largest single federal investment in public infrastructure since World War II, a total of \$33 billion over seven years for roads, bridges, water systems, public transit and international gateways.

A key component of our building Canada plan is the federal gas tax fund that provides direct funding for essential infrastructure for Canadian cities, towns and communities.

In budget 2007, our government extended this funding to 2014. Budget 2008 goes an important step further by extending the federal gas tax funding permanently. This initiative provides \$2 billion a year starting in 2009-10 and that is forever. This is money that municipalities can bank on and build into their long term capital planning. Municipalities asked us for it and we delivered.

Gordon Steeves, president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and a Winnipeg councillor said:

Budget 2008 delivers good news for cities and communities. The decision to make the gas tax transfer permanent represents a critical move toward addressing the municipal fiscal imbalance and building vibrant cities and communities. The permanent gas tax fund sets a new standard for the way the Government of Canada supports cities and communities

Budget 2008 is all about investing: investing in our people, investing in our future. It all starts with ensuring that future generations have the opportunity to be the best that they can be and

that future includes aboriginal Canadians. Our government has made significant progress in supporting our aboriginal population.

Budget 2008 builds on this program in a number of areas with measures to foster new aboriginal economic development: improvements in first nations and Inuit health and education outcomes, funding for prevention-based models of child and family services on reserves, and improved access to safe drinking water in first nation communities.

In today's increasingly knowledge-based economy Canada needs a highly skilled workforce. To that end, budget 2008 is investing in a new post-secondary Canada student grant program that will integrate existing grants and provide more effective support to more students for more years of study.

Our government will provide \$350 million for this Canada student grant program in 2009-10, growing to \$400 million in 2010-11, with continued growth going forward. This funding will reach an estimated 245,000 students. That will benefit over 100,000 low and middle income families, more than the current system.

This is a significant investment in our future. Building on that investment, budget 2008 is creating 500 new doctoral scholarships under the Canada graduate scholarships program.

These scholarships, named in honour of the former Governor General Georges P. Vanier, will help develop and attract the new generation of world-class researchers, by providing \$100 million over five years beginning in 2008-09 to attract the best doctoral students, from here and around the world, to study in Canada. The Canadian Federation of Students has come out strongly in support of the budget saying, "The government has taken a positive step towards improving access to post-secondary education".

●(1705)

Of course, it is important to nurture our best and brightest here at home, but one of the greatest challenges facing Canada today is the shortage of skilled workers. This fact, coupled with an aging population, means that we also need to look beyond our borders to ensure we have the workforce required to build a stronger future.

In recognition of this need, budget 2008 takes action to improve the responsiveness of our immigration system. This new funding will complement existing programs by modernizing and speeding up the immigration system so that we can get the appropriate people to meet our labour market needs. Our people are certainly our most important resource.

The Budget

Canadians are known as a compassionate society, and we must look after each other. For its part the government has taken action to help those who need it most. In budget 2007 we introduced the working income tax benefit to help people over the so-called welfare wall. We also introduced a registered disability savings plan to help parents save for the long term financial security of their disabled children.

Budget 2008 provides further support for vulnerable Canadians. Specifically, this year's budget provides \$110 million to the Mental Health Commission of Canada. This funding will help support demonstration pilot projects on housing and complementary community support services. This initiative will also help us recognize the needs of those who are homeless and suffering from a mental illness so that we can take the appropriate action to meet those needs.

Preserving and protecting our environment is, no doubt, one of the most important issues to Canadians today. They expect their government to take action to reduce harmful emissions, ensure clean drinking water and crack down on polluters. And we have taken action. Since coming into office, our government has made significant investments to support cleaner energy, clean transportation alternatives and the development of green technology.

In budget 2008 we are taking further action to fulfill our commitments to a cleaner, healthier environment. For example, budget 2008 is committing \$250 million for carbon capture and storage projects. Furthermore, our government is providing \$66 million over two years to lay the foundation for market-based mechanisms that will help establish a price for carbon and support the development of carbon trading in Canada.

As well, this year's budget provides \$13 million over two years to accelerate access to cleaner renewable fuels for cars and trucks.

The budget is also further extending tax incentives for clean energy generation.

What good are environmental laws if we cannot enforce them? That is why this budget also provides \$21 million specifically for that enforcement. This action illustrates this government's commitment to actually do something about the environment, not just talk about it. That is what this government is about: taking action and getting the job done. Taking action requires strong leadership, and that means not being afraid to step up to the plate, make decisions and establish priorities.

This government is determined to safeguard Canada's strong economic and fiscal fundamentals to avoid falling back into deficit. Just like any family, we want to ensure that we live within our means. In budget 2008 we have done just that. It is a budget that is thoughtful and responsible. It is a budget that is good for Canada and good for Canadians.

• (1710)

Hon. Garth Turner (Halton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the parliamentary secretary with care, certainly when he talked about the Government of Canada living within its means. He referenced a Canadian family when he made that statement.

I want to ask the parliamentary secretary, does he believe that a Canadian family could increase its spending over the course of two years by double the rate of inflation and still be within its budgetary envelope, especially when its revenues did not go up? How on earth could that be prudent when we have increased spending by that amount of money? Would you counsel a family in your riding that it would be fine in terms—

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Halton should refrain from using the second person.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, I guess there was a question in that, but I am just a little puzzled by the member's comments that he was actually listening to my speech when I could hear in the background the hon. member suggesting that I may not know exactly what I am talking about.

I do not think that it would be my place in my role as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance to be speculating about doubling inflation. The suggestion by the hon. member perhaps came from the Liberal suggestion that they would spend over \$90 billion this coming year if they were in government, which would drive us another \$62.5 billion in debt. Perhaps that is the hon. member's method of financing, but that will not be the way that this government operates.

I do want to highlight some of the things that we have done, but which I did not have an opportunity to talk about in my speech. Something that is very important in my riding, for example, is a new police college that is being built in my riding and the funds—

• (1715)

The Deputy Speaker: There is a great appetite for questions so I am going to try to get all kinds of people in. The hon. member for Western Arctic.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will try to be prompt with my question. The hon. member in his speech talked about the money that is put into carbon capture and storage in the budget, some \$240 million. At the same time, the only new money in the budget for clean energy is about \$5 million over two years under the accelerated capital cost allowance.

There is a need for some analysis of the results of some of these projects. I sit on the natural resources committee, and we did not see any analysis of carbon capture and storage in comparison to other strategies for greenhouse gas reduction in this country.

Could the hon. member tell us how the government has come to the conclusion that this investment of Canadian funds is so much better than many of the other possibilities that we have in the country to more directly reduce greenhouse gas emissions right away? Why should we be pouring money into a very strong oil and gas industry that has the resources to invest its own money in dealing with its own pollution problems?

The Budget

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, indeed, the NDP loves to condemn the oil and gas sector so badly, a sector that contributes over \$5 billion a year in taxes, that pays Canadians wages, grows our economy and employs Canadians. I do not know why the NDP seems to be so unexplainably opposed to an industry that does pay its own way.

The hon. member asked about our environmental plan for expenditures that will help the environment this year. There is \$500 million for public transit, and the hon. member suggests that we have done nothing. There is \$250 million for carbon capture and storage. These are forward thinking ideas that the rest of the world would like to have the opportunity to parallel along with us.

We have increased the CCA rate on CO₂ pipelines. We have put in \$10 million for biofuels research. We have put in \$3 million for E85 fuel infrastructure—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I have a feeling that exchange has come to an end, too. Further questions and comments. The hon. member for Scarborough Centre.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary talked about balanced budgets, et cetera. I think he was a bit unfair because the current Minister of Finance was in the provincial government for nine years and that government did not balance one budget. For the record, I want to clarify that he left Ontario with a deficit of almost \$6 billion.

Nevertheless, I want to ask the member why his government has been so unfair to the city of Toronto. Toronto is having to raise property taxes, and levies for hockey arenas, community centres and garbage because Toronto is being starved.

I was happy that he said that the Conservatives are extending the gas tax. In essence he is confirming that the Liberal government started the gas tax and the Conservatives now see the light to extend it.

Why are the Conservatives starving Toronto? What have they got against Toronto? I know the Minister of Finance says that they are not in the pothole repair business, but that is part of Canada, too. Why are they being so unfair to Toronto?

• (1720)

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, as we have heard in the House before, I reject the premise of that question. We are not forsaking any city in this country.

I would encourage my hon. colleague who asked the question to go back to Ontario and remind the premier that Ontario's share of the largest infrastructure contribution from the federal government is waiting for his signature, and the premier is blaming us for inaction. Premier McGuinty has not yet signed the agreement that would provide money to repair the streets in Toronto.

An hon. member: It is \$162 million a year.

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, it is \$162 million a year. I am reminded by one of my colleagues from Ontario that is the amount.

There is \$2 billion in the gas tax fund. The Liberals suggest it was their idea. We have heard a number of things in the House that were

their idea but did not get implemented. That is the unfortunate part of this.

However, we actually have to stop and thank the hon. members of the Liberal Party for recognizing the benefits that will come from this budget and for supporting it.

Hon. Joe McGuire (Egmont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on page 71 of the budget papers, with respect to the employment insurance program, the government announced that it is going to form a crown corporation to set rates. There does not appear to be any other function but to set rates.

I wonder why the government needs a crown corporation to set rates when that expertise is in the department and it could set rates at the stroke of a pen, really. I do not think it would take a crown corporation to determine what a proper break-even rate is.

It says it will be a new, independent crown corporation and proceeds to say that the maximum annual charge set by the CEIFB will be 15¢. If it is free, an independent should be able to set those rates on its own.

My main question is why a crown corporation, why set up a whole new bureaucracy merely to set rates for EI?

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, I agree with an hon. member who said that is a good question. If the Liberals were honest with themselves, they would realize that question is leading them down a path that they probably do not want to go. There is a reason that we are creating a crown corporation. It is because of the abuse that happened under 13 years of Liberal government to the EI account.

We have guaranteed there will be \$2 billion put into this and it will be run completely separate so that no party that is ever in power can get its hands on the workers' money.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while I thank the parliamentary secretary for the riveting speech, I hope he did not overpay for it.

I will be splitting my time with the member for Halton. I have only a few minutes left, so I take it that I will see everyone in the morning.

We have all noted that the finance minister has been running around the country for the last three or four months saying there is no money in the cupboard, the cupboard is bare, we are broke, and telling us to not have any great expectations of this budget, and for certain yesterday he delivered on that expectation. There were very low expectations and he certainly met those low expectations.

Interestingly, the *Globe and Mail* this morning in its editorial picked up on that very theme and talked about Minister of Finance's "empty cupboard". The point of the editorial is that it was the Minister of Finance that emptied the cupboard in the first place, so naturally he does not have any money for anything. As a consequence, we see what we see in this rather pathetic budget.

What is really sad is that the Conservative government started out with a fiscal surplus. It started out with 13 years of sound fiscal management. It started out with one of the most prosperous economies in the G-7.

Also, interestingly, it started with almost \$100 billion in a five year planning surplus, going from 2005 through to 2010. But where will we be in 2010? If we look at page 25 of the government's budget, we can see that the surplus will be down to \$1.3 billion. I do not think that even Paris Hilton could spend it that quickly. These guys are in a league by themselves. I am sure that Paris Hilton is probably watching this debate and wondering how in heaven's name they did it.

Again, I direct members' attention to page 25, which is really the only page we need to read in the budget. The rest of the budget is a 415 page spin document. Let us look at their document. The Conservatives actually increase their revenues over a four year period by \$16 billion. Over the same period, they increase their spending by \$30 billion.

I do not know how other members do their budgeting, but in my house and I dare say pretty well all the members' houses, people cannot actually spend more than is brought in. Households cannot be run that way. Businesses cannot be run that way. Certainly a government cannot be run that way. It is an incredible testimony to the incompetence of the minister.

I do not want to disturb the Minister of the Environment in his reading of *Frank* magazine, which constitutes his briefing materials most days, but even he would understand that we cannot spend faster than we bring the money in. It is pretty simple.

For the particular year that the government actually presents for this year, the fiscal year 2008-09, the government has actually reduced the revenues by about \$2.5 billion. Meanwhile, the government's expenditures in the same year go up by \$7 billion, the consequence of which is that this country actually ends up perilously close to a deficit.

The government has canned the whole idea of prudence money. When a Liberal government was producing budgets, we had a minimum contingency of \$3 billion and frequently built into the budget another \$1 billion, \$2 billion or \$3 billion to actually create cushions for unanticipated events. For instance, SARS was an unanticipated event. As well, the peso crisis was an unanticipated event.

The incompetence in this budget is manifest. We are very close to a recession. Certainly there is a recession in the U.S. The government has actually taken its GDP numbers and reduced its GDP numbers in the last three months by 25%. That brings them right down to the edge.

Again, if the hon. Minister of the Environment could actually read his own budget, he would realize that he was one of the ministers who was left out. The word "environment" is virtually not mentioned in this budget.

•(1725)

Here we have \$16 billion going down the drain. We simply cannot carry on this way. Traditionally in prudent budgets, we do build in some cushions, but that government and those particular members do not seem to understand prudence. They do not seem to understand that we cannot spend more than we get in. It is rather amusing to hear them traipse on about how they think this is a good thing—

Private Members' Business

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member because the House was just getting so lively. However, it being 5:30, the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-343, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (motor vehicle theft), as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

The Deputy Speaker: There being no motions at report stage, the House will now proceed without debate to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

•(1730)

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC) moved that the bill be concurred in at report stage.

(Motion agreed to)

The Deputy Speaker: When shall the bill be read the third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Andrew Scheer moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I want to personally thank all the members of the justice committee for their work on my private member's bill. I very much enjoyed my time before the committee when I had an opportunity to present. I presented along with representatives from the car insurance industry, members of the RCMP and other interested stakeholders who have long been asking for government to make some changes to the Criminal Code to better address the problem of motor vehicle theft in our country.

While I am disappointed that some major tenets of my bill tackling car theft were taken out at committee, I appreciate the fact that the committee passed several aspects, which remain in the bill we are debating today. The portions that were cut out all pertain to the mandatory jail times for repeat car thieves.

I think that was a mistake because it is precisely the repeat car thieves that we need to get tough on. Every region in Canada has been affected by the theft of cars and trucks. Indeed, lives have been lost. In addition, there have been billions of dollars of costs for car owners and insurance premium payers.

However, what remains is something that organizations have been asking for. If the bill as currently worded passes today, we will be establishing a separate offence for theft of a motor vehicle. This is something that the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police has long been asking for.

The bill also sets out some maximum sentencing provisions. As the maximum penalty is 10 years as the bill is now written, this brings about an interesting set of circumstances. In the last year, the government passed Bill C-9, which limited the use of conditional sentences such as house arrest.

Private Members' Business

The passage of this bill means that people who commit certain offences that carry maximum penalties of 10 years or greater are ineligible for house arrest. They must actually face time in prison. While theft of a motor vehicle does not automatically fall into this category, Bill C-9 has the effect that crimes which fall under section 752 of the Criminal Code are not eligible for a sentence of house arrest.

In addition to those crimes listed, any “conduct endangering or likely to endanger the life or safety of another person or inflicting or likely to inflict severe psychological damage on another person” falls into this category. This would mean that when car thieves steal a car and, after perpetrating the crime, proceed into a high speed chase or dangerous driving, for example, in which they endanger the lives of other motorists, they would be subject to this provision.

So at least some positive aspects of the bill have remained.

I truly believe that when people are convicted of stealing a car or truck for the third time it is time for them to face real consequences. The bill as originally worded contained this provision. It was a “three strikes and you're out” provision, whereby upon the third conviction of theft of a motor vehicle the minimum sentence would be at least two years in jail. I think most Canadians agree that a two year prison sentence is not too harsh for a person who has stolen cars or trucks three times.

The problem is that too often our neighbourhoods are made to be rehab centres. Honest Canadians are forced to live close to all kinds of dangerous and repeat offenders because of a legal system that too often puts the rights of criminals ahead of the rights of honest citizens.

However, in a minority Parliament I understand that compromises are going to be made, that the opposition has the ultimate say in what kind of bill gets passed, and that there has to be cooperation among all parties. I am very pleased that all parties were able to work together at committee to come up with a version of the bill that was palatable to all the justice critics of the parties and to all representatives on the committee.

I will conclude here. I know that I have an entitlement to a 15 minute time slot, but I have had a number of conversations with members of the other parties and I think that the bill as it is currently worded is acceptable to most members. I am going to conclude my remarks early in the hope that we can finish debate at third reading very quickly to speed up passage of the bill and get it over to the other place in a timely manner.

• (1735)

The Deputy Speaker: There is provision for a five minute question and comment period. Are there any questions or comments for the hon. member?

If not, resuming debate, the hon. member for Hochelaga.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to congratulate our colleague on his bill. For several years I have been advocating within my party and elsewhere that we should all have the opportunity to submit a motion or a bill to the House, and that there should be two hours of debate each day for

private members' business. The government has a lot of influence in our parliamentary system, but when it comes down to it, we are all parliamentarians. I think this idea will be well-received by the likeable member for Joliette.

That said, today we are discussing the very important matter of car theft. Anyone who has studied law in recent years will know about the distinction made between theft over \$5,000 and theft under \$5,000. Today, if the House passes this bill—and this seems likely—we will amend section 334.1 of the Criminal Code, so that there is no minimum penalty.

The Bloc Québécois was uncomfortable with the first version of the bill. We do not deny that car theft is an important issue. We believe that car theft is not a victimless crime and that, in some communities, car theft can limit the mobility of individuals and families and can prevent them from earning a living. We agree with having an offence system in the Criminal Code that deals specifically with car theft.

The Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights worked very hard to satisfy the bill's sponsor and to build consensus among all of the parties represented on the committee. We agreed to remove mandatory minimum sentences, and to create a maximum sentence. Now, to reflect current legal practice, a distinction will be made between summary convictions, which carry a two-year prison sentence, and indictable offences, which result in criminal records, require fingerprinting and carry a maximum sentence. The procedure is to be determined by the Crown prosecutor. Judicial independence will be respected. Judges will be given the power to assess each case on its merits. For an indictable offence of auto theft, the maximum sentence will be 10 years in prison.

We have been told that some communities, such as Winnipeg, are deeply concerned about this phenomenon. Winnipeg citizens and the city's chiefs of police appeared before the committee to talk about it.

I would like to conclude with a quotation from Mark Yakabuski, President and CEO of the Insurance Bureau of Canada, home and auto insurance. His statement was compelling, and I would like to close with what he said about the growing auto theft phenomenon.

For a number of years we have seen not only the costs associated with auto theft rise, but the increasing implication of organized criminal activity in the stealing of automobiles across this country. Because the current penalties associated with it are so lenient and the profits are so great, auto theft has become a major focus of criminal organizations in Canada.

He explained that organized crime rings are interested in stealing cars. He went on to say that:

Organized crime steals vehicles, chops them up to sell parts of specious quality, uses the vehicle identification number to change the identity of another stolen car then sold to an unsuspecting consumer—

Private Members' Business

Under the Criminal Code, that unsuspecting consumer could be charged with possession of stolen goods.

He went on to say that:

On top of that, [organized crime] exports thousands of vehicles through Canada's ports each year to Africa, eastern Europe, and the Middle East, where they can fetch a much higher price than they can at home.

● (1740)

In 2006, a total of 159,000 vehicles were stolen in Canada. The cost to auto insurance policyholders was approximately \$600 million—

This is clearly a major phenomenon. As a result, vehicle owners and insured drivers have seen their insurance premiums rise by \$40.

The last point I want to make is that a separate offence will be created for auto theft. Depending on the procedure, it may be punishable by sentences of two to 10 years. This bill deserves our support. Auto theft is not a victimless crime. I think that insurance companies have made it clear just how attractive this kind of theft is to organized crime rings, and they have explained how it affects consumers.

I would like to congratulate the bill's sponsor. The Bloc Québécois would like to see this bill passed and receive royal assent.

[English]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I echo the comments of my colleague from Hochelaga. This was a good initiative on the part of the member from the Conservative Party who brought this forward. I would like to think that it would have been one of those that the government would have actually moved on at an earlier stage. In any event, we are at that point and it has all party support.

We heard in the course of the testimony at committee that a number of the provinces and their prosecutors at the provincial level felt strongly about the need to create a separate offence. Auto theft had always been covered historically under the general theft provisions of the code, but what they needed to do, because of the high incident rate of auto theft in the country, was to create a separate offence and then be able to deal with it in terms of penalties, with that new evidence going in that it was a specific theft, in the form of an auto theft, particularly if we had repeat offenders, that they could be dealt with more harshly by way of using indictment rather than a summary conviction.

All too often we were hearing of cases where the summary conviction approach was taken, with theft generally, where penalties were being meted out that were not adequate or responsive, particularly, and this is one of the other points that came up repeatedly, with the amount of organized crime that is involved in auto theft now where organized crime figures will actually assign individuals to steal specific cars and then sell them, oftentimes, offshore. We need stiffer penalties to deal with this specific crime.

We have all agreed that we will shorten our speeches but I want to make one other point, and that is that additional work needs to be done in the preventive area of auto theft.

We took a fair amount of evidence from, and I will signal up your home province, Mr. Speaker, the province of Manitoba and the work it has done on requiring immobilizers to be placed on all vehicles in that province. Immobilizers are a new technology which makes it

impossible to steal a vehicle and, so far, the immobilizer has not been broken by either organized crime or thieves generally. If there is an attempt to steal the vehicle, the immobilizer just shuts the vehicle down. It cannot be operated and, therefore, the vehicle is no longer available to be stolen.

The Province of Manitoba has mandated that to have car insurance in that province, people must have an immobilizer on their car. This is a major step forward in simply making it impossible to steal cars. The auto manufacturers, both in Canada and internationally, need to take some lessons from that experience and provide this technology on all new vehicles as they come on to the market. The federal government could be playing some role in that, at least from a policy standpoint, to ensure that happens. If that does occur, this section of the code may, at some point in the future, become one of those sections we go back and repeal because we will no longer have auto theft in this country.

I am maybe being a bit optimistic on that ever happening but hope springs eternal in the human breasts.

● (1745)

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the report stage of Bill C-343, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (motor vehicle theft), and to express my support for the bill. I congratulate my colleague for putting this bill forward because it is a step in the right direction in addressing a serious issue that so many Canadians face today.

I do want to make a note that while the government claims to be tough on crime, it did not take the initiative to bring this bill forward as a government bill. I wonder if it does not understand the seriousness of motor theft. It claims to support the initiative but it could have brought this forward as a government bill. However, I am happy to see it in the House.

We know that auto theft is a serious threat across the country and, as you well know, Mr. Speaker, it is a matter of great concern for many of the residents of the city of Winnipeg.

According to the Winnipeg Police Service website, every hour in Winnipeg a vehicle is stolen and over 90% of the vehicles are recovered. This shows that most vehicles that are stolen on the streets of Winnipeg are stolen for the mere fact that these thieves simply want to go on a joyride, not considering at all the individuals who are affected.

I have had the opportunity in the last months to meet a number of times with the leadership of the District 6 police in the city of Winnipeg, which is the area encompassing the jurisdiction that I represent. I met with Inspector Roy Smith and Staff Sergeant Keith Walker. They spent a fair bit of time with me, giving me some indication of the seriousness of the challenges in Winnipeg with auto theft and with theft in general. They acknowledged that it was going down. It is going down but it is going down with a huge concerted effort and resources of the police department.

Private Members' Business

Recently I attended the City of Winnipeg's mayor's State of the City speech that he gave to the Chamber of Commerce. He, too, referenced the fact that auto theft did go down by 27% last year, but he also noted that auto theft attempts had gone up by 8.8%. Unfortunately, the problem is not going away, and we know that the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation has undertaken many initiatives to curtail auto theft crime but it is of great significance.

From January 1 to February 17, according to the Winnipeg Crime Stoppers' website, there have been 595 actual car thefts and 589 attempted car thefts. This is a staggering number that appears to be slowly going down in the city but still alarming enough that the issue must be addressed. That does sort of verify the figure of a theft an hour because it is 24 per a 24-hour period. It is simply not acceptable for that to be happening.

We learned from the police that when certain known car theft perpetrators are apprehended and in custody, the numbers go down.

Last September, like other Manitoba members of Parliament and other members of Parliament in my caucus, I was able to meet with the Manitoba delegation that came to Ottawa to address the government and the opposition. My colleagues and I in the Liberal caucus met with Premier Gary Doer; Justice Minister Chomiak; Mayor Katz; Mayor Burgess of Brandon; provincial opposition leaders; Dr. Jon Gerrard and Mr. Hugh McFayden; Chief Dennis Meeches of the Long Plains First Nation and a variety of citizens who have been affected by crime in Manitoba.

●(1750)

They brought forward a number of proposals dealing with criminal activity and offences. The one that resonated with me, and what I heard from the police in District 6, was that if we did one thing, the one most important thing, would be to make auto theft an indictable offence.

The concerns that the delegation brought to the table were those of auto theft. They expressed the need for tougher penalties and called on the Government of Canada to take action. As I mentioned earlier, I am disappointed that making auto theft an indictable offence was not part of the government's crime initiatives.

The Conservatives claim to be tough on crime, but it is part of the game. The tackling violent crime bill was delayed by the Conservatives themselves. They then tried to force it through the Senate. They play games with the safety of Canadians and only take action when they have a political agenda.

I commend my colleague for raising this important issue which must be addressed.

I heard the delegation loud and clear. Bill C-343 is a step in the right direction. It would make everyone who commits a theft of a motor vehicle guilty of an indictable offence or an offence punishable on summary conviction, but I feel we can go even further.

In the coming days I will be introducing a bill of my own that would build on the bill put forward by my colleague. My bill would make everyone who commits a subsequent offence guilty of an indictable offence. It would not leave them an option. I think it would deter thieves from creating a second offence.

This is important for the safety of the citizens of my community. I am not aware of the prevalence of auto theft elsewhere in the country, but I do know of it in my own community. I am firmly committed in undertaking every effort to address what has become a very serious issue in the city of Winnipeg.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I sat with members from all parties on the justice committee and in a sense worked with the bill that the hon. member has moved here in the House. This is a bill whose time has come.

I want to address one thing in my remarks which I do not think has been mentioned here tonight and that is that the existence of a separate theft offence will now allow the development of a separate and more focused jurisprudence with respect to the offence of auto theft.

In other words, prosecutors, judges, insurance industry executives, and offenders will be able to observe a specific pattern of sentencing, of procedure, to charge and convict based on certain protocols or understandings in different provinces and different cities with respect to the concept of the second offence.

It is a healthy thing to allow communities to deal with the cause of crime and to try and impose some sense of deterrence, keeping in mind that deterrence for the most part, and I may be disagreeing with my colleague here to some degree, is not based on the seriousness of the penalty attached to the offence. Deterrence is actually more a function of the likelihood to be caught and charged, so that is a police enforcement issue.

I feel that this new section dealing specifically with auto theft would allow for improved mechanisms of enforcement and some of those have already been mentioned in debate here.

I congratulate the member and also indicate my support for the bill.

●(1755)

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate. If there is no further debate, the hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle may want to take advantage of his right of reply and speak for five minutes or less.

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): It will be less, Mr. Speaker, as I understand we are sitting late tonight. Out of pity for the chair occupant who has to remain until the end of the evening I will be as brief as possible.

I want to thank the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River. I have had a number of very good conversations with him about this bill and some of his ideas. I want to thank the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

[*Translation*]

I would also like to thank the hon. member for Hochelaga and the other parties for supporting my bill.

[*English*]

I want to comment very briefly on the honour I feel I have received from my colleagues. I know it is very rare for a private member's bill to make it this far and it looks like it will make it past third reading tonight.

There are many members of Parliament who have been here a lot longer than I have who have tried to get their private member's bill through and have not been able to do so. To be able to get support of other members of Parliament for this is something I truly appreciate.

I agree with the member for Scarborough—Rouge River that this bill is not as I wrote it. I think it is missing some of the articles I put in, which I think were needed; however, we will not let the perfect become the enemy of the good. I very much—

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. With the unanimous consent of the House, I would like to move the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, during the debate tonight on the concurrence motion, the Chair shall not receive any quorum calls, dilatory motions, or requests for unanimous consent; at the end of the time remaining for the debate, or when no member rises to speak, the question shall be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. parliamentary secretary have unanimous consent to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: 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)

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-343, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (motor vehicle theft) be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for doing that at this time.

I will wrap up there. I think this is a good bill. It does a lot of what the insurance industry has been asking for along with the associations of police chiefs. I will leave it at that. I sincerely thank all those who have helped me work on this bill.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent of the House to see the clock as 6:30 so that we might proceed with the next item?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Routine Proceedings

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

The House resumed from February 15 consideration of the motion.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I stand to speak to the second report of the Standing Committee on Official Languages which deals with the Court Challenges Program.

The first recommendation of the report is the following:

That the government clearly explain to Canadians its reasons for cancelling the Court Challenges Program.

The second recommendation is as follows:

That the Government of Canada re-establish the Court Challenges Program under the terms of the contribution agreement that was in effect before its cancellation was announced on September 25, 2006.

We must ask ourselves a few questions: What is the court challenges program? How can it be explained? Why is it important for minority communities across Canada, whether they be francophone as in some regions or anglophone as in Quebec?

For example, according to section 93 of the Constitution Act, 1867, the rights and privileges of confessional schools are protected. Section 23 of the Manitoba Act, 1870, states that French and English can both be used in the Manitoba legislative assembly and in the publication of acts adopted by that assembly. All that relates to language rights.

Sections 16 and 22 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms of the Constitution Act, 1982 establish French and English as the two official languages of Canada and New Brunswick. These sections address issues related to parliamentary proceedings, publication of statutes and records, courts and tribunals, and communication with the public.

Section 23 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms of the Constitution Act, 1982 establishes minority language education rights, including the right of linguistic minorities to manage their schools.

Section 2 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms of the Constitution Act, 1982 protects the freedom of expression—eligible cases defined by the program mandate.

Section 15 protects equality rights, equal benefit of the law without discrimination.

Section 28 protects the equality of men and women.

Section 2 protects fundamental freedoms; section 27, multiculturalism—eligible cases defined by the program mandate.

I wanted to review the legislation, because it is important. We all know that Canada has legislation that governs our two official languages, French and English or English and French.

Routine Proceedings

We have had legislation for years, but nothing concrete was done. Consider the Official Languages Act. In part VII, section 41 of the Official Languages Act states:

41(1) The Government of Canada is committed to enhancing the vitality of the English and French linguistic minority communities in Canada and supporting and assisting their development; and fostering the full recognition and use of both English and French in Canadian society.

Subsection 41(2) states:

41(2) Every federal institution has the duty to ensure that positive measures are taken for the implementation of the commitments under subsection (1). For greater certainty, this implementation shall be carried out while respecting the jurisdiction and powers of the provinces.

● (1800)

Let us look at what happened and why a report has been tabled in the House of Commons. In 2007, parliamentarians from all political parties toured the country on the issue of official languages. The Standing Committee on Official Languages has been in existence for 25 years. Never before had the political parties agreed to have the committee travel across the country to talk to Canadians and Quebecers about what they thought of the Official Languages Act, how the government complied with the act or whether there were any needs that the parliamentarians could lay before Parliament.

I had the honour to chair the Standing Committee on Official Languages that made the national tour. We left from St. John's, Newfoundland, and travelled to Moncton, where we met with individuals and organization representatives from Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick. We went on to Sherbrooke, Quebec. We visited Bishop's University, an English-language university in Quebec. We did not want to go just to Montreal, McGill and English-language communities. We wanted to go to Sherbrooke to visit smaller anglophone minority communities in Quebec. We travelled to Toronto, Sudbury, Winnipeg, Edmonton, Regina and Vancouver. We toured the country and met people from every province.

When we did this tour, even though we were talking about official languages, the federal government had already decided to abolish the court challenges program, which provided individuals and organizations with funding to go to court when they felt the act and their language rights had been violated. They could seek a judgment from the Federal Court of Canada or a provincial court.

Members of all the political parties were on this national tour. At every meeting we held, people talked about the court challenges program. Everywhere we went, as soon as we began the meeting and gave the first witness a chance to speak, the court challenges program came up. For minorities in Canada, it was the tool that enabled them to go to court when they felt their rights had been violated. The court challenges program is very important to Canadians. It gives individuals the opportunity to defend their rights in federal court and other courts.

In New Brunswick, for example, the court challenges program made it possible for citizens to go to court. They won and obtained their schools. The same thing happened in Prince Edward Island. In New Brunswick, Ms. Paulin, from the Tracadie-Sheila area, was pulled over by the RCMP in Fredericton and wanted to be spoken to in French; however, the RCMP refused. The case went to court and the expenses were paid by the court challenges program. In this

example, the RCMP and the Province of New Brunswick decided to provide service in both languages as a result of an out-of-court settlement. Without this program, francophones in New Brunswick would never have obtained this right, even though we have the Official Languages Act. The RCMP, a federal police force, did not want to provide service in both official languages. Furthermore, this happened in New Brunswick, a province officially recognized as bilingual by the Constitution.

● (1805)

A decision was handed down. In cases such as that of Ms. Paulin, how can you expect an individual to take the Government of Canada, or a provincial government, to the Federal Court and win the case? This will never happen and these cases will never form part of our jurisprudence.

The Conservative federal government has said that there should not be court challenges because the provinces have legal aid. For goodness sake! Legal aid was definitely not intended for language cases. No one can ask legal aid lawyers to defend such cases.

A report was presented to the minister in December. Furthermore, another report was presented in May of last year on court challenges. However, the government response provided by the Minister of Official Languages says absolutely nothing about court challenges. She completely ignored them.

We are coming to a sad realization today. As I said, we toured Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Manitoba, British Columbia and Ontario. In Sudbury, we were told in no uncertain terms that there would not be no Collège Boréal in Sudbury, Timmins and Kapuskasing or French-speaking institutions in Ontario today if it were not for the court challenges program. Also, Mrs. Lalonde made it clear to us that what made the difference in allowing Montfort Hospital to win its case recently was the \$70,000 received by the foundation under the court challenges program. They were short by that amount to be able to continue litigation.

It is important to recall that the ministers involved at the provincial level, in Ontario, at the time are the same ones who are now sitting at the federal level. The former Minister of Finance of Ontario is now the Minister of Finance here, in the House, in the Conservative government. When he was in the Harris government, he wanted to shut down Montfort, the only teaching hospital in Ontario where training could be provided in French, among other things. He wanted to shut it down. Then, the government took away from us this instrument for justice.

Routine Proceedings

The government contended that this was a program for the Liberals and that lawyers were riding the money train. I know that is not true of those lawyers who worked on cases in New Brunswick. Incidentally, the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada was in court Monday morning in Fredericton, New Brunswick, on an issue involving the court challenges program. The lawyers who worked on behalf of the organization, lawyers like Michel Doucet, did not even charge the organization one red cent. It is not true that lawyers work on that case to make money. These lawyers are volunteering their time to the cause of bilingualism in Canada. It is shameful that they are treated the way they are.

I would go even further. What did the government, the Conservative minister responsible for the cuts tell Parliament at the time? He said that the government would not pay for people to hire lawyers to fight the government, that it would not pay for that.

Who pays for the government's lawyers though? The taxpayers do. When an ordinary citizen goes before the court to seek justice, is the government prepared not to fight through its lawyers and let the court settle the case? No, it sends its lawyers whose fees are paid by the taxpayers.

A case like the one that was heard on Monday and Tuesday in Fredericton, regarding the Court Challenges Program, can cost between \$25,000 and \$30,000 just for legal fees. The government and its lawyers came to court. They started by asking the court to agree with them. The government wants to be right.

• (1810)

In addition, the government wants the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada to pay the legal fees if the federation loses its case. If the judge finds in favour of the government, the government wants the federation to pay the legal fees.

The big government, with its billions of dollars of surplus, is telling ordinary people that if they lose their case, they will have to pay the legal fees. Not only that but, in its claim, the government is telling judges that they cannot dictate how it should spend money. Imagine that. The government is saying that the judges cannot dictate how it should spend its money. The government is also saying that, although an official languages act exists, it can be broken. If the government breaks that law, citizens are not allowed to go to court, and judges are not allowed find in favour of them.

What about all the cases that have been won? What about all the cases regarding schools, for example? What about the Montfort Hospital case, which was won?

The government is saying that the court does not have the right to tell the government how to spend public funds. It is simple. The government even says this in its application. This is its defence:

Generally speaking, it is not the courts' job to tell the government how to spend public funds. It is the political officials' job, and the voters will judge their actions.

Too bad for the minority. The Conservative government is telling the minority that if it wants to fight the government, it will have to use its own money and it will have to pay costs if it loses its case, because this government does not even want to pay court costs or its own expenses.

What is more, the government is telling the judges that they have no business ruling on the case, because it is not up to them to tell the government how to spend its money.

The government is insulting the minority. The minority, francophones, individuals, anglophones in Montreal: these are not the big oil companies in Alberta. When big companies with tons of money take us to court, then maybe we can tell them that they will have to pay our costs because they took us to court. But we cannot ask regular people to pay \$30,000 in costs if they lose their case. Not only does the government not want to pay by way of the court challenges program, but if people have the nerve to stand up and defend their rights, they will have to pay.

And the Conservatives say they support francophone Canada? They say they support bilingualism in Canada and will respect it? I have a hard time believing that. I have a hard time believing that because of what they did yesterday and the day before in Fredericton, New Brunswick.

New Brunswickers were forced to go to court to fight for rights they are already guaranteed under Canada's Constitution, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Official Languages Act.

They even went further. Just imagine. A bill was passed here a few years ago and, at the time, the Conservatives supported it. Yesterday, in its arguments on Bill S-3, which makes the Official Languages Act binding, the government said that this legislation had not changed anything. Just imagine. The government told the New Brunswick justice that Bill S-3 had not changed anything, and that the court should not get involved in the decisions made by the government.

The way minorities in Canada are treated is pathetic. That said, I am pleased that this bill was introduced. Let us hope that the government will open its eyes on this issue. It should regret that, in the budget that it just tabled in the House, there is not even a penny for minorities in Canada, or for official languages. The government says that it will look at this issue later on. This means that such is the situation for official languages in Canada, and that the issue will be looked at later on.

• (1815)

They had two years to implement an action plan to help official language minorities in Canada, that is anglophones in Quebec and francophones in the rest of Canada. However, through its decisions, the government is ignoring the official languages of this country and is refusing to respect them.

• (1820)

[English]

Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I very much to second the sentiments of my friend from New Brunswick. He speaks passionately about the importance of the court challenges program, particularly to minorities, whether they are anglophone, francophone or other minorities in the country.

Routine Proceedings

I want to speak specifically to our official languages and to our francophone minorities in particular. He has some family in the northern part of my riding. I agree with him that we need to convince the government that it is not something we should do in the future. It is something that already should have been done by the government, which is to reinstate a program that makes the courts successful. People should not have to be rich to access the courts.

The court challenges program levelled the playing field. The number of very important precedents that were set by the courts, because of that program, have made our country the kind of country it is. We must ensure our minorities have access to the courts.

Would the member tell me if it is too late for the government to change its mind? I do not think it is. I suspect he will agree that it is not too late. Is it an urgent matter? Are there situations now that need to be addressed? As he is such a passionate promoter of these issues, I would like to hear more from him.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague. The importance of the court challenges program was the little person could go and have his or her rights respected.

I will use the example of Madame Paulin in Tracadie-Sheila. She was driving in Fredericton and the RCMP stopped her. New Brunswick is officially a bilingual province in our Constitution under Bill 88. When we look at this case, Madame Paulin would never have had any justice. The justice she received is not only for her. The idea of the court challenges program is when a person goes to court, it benefits everyone across the country.

Many countries have more than one or two languages. Some countries have six languages. Canada is special because we have the aboriginals who were here first, our first nations. Then we have the anglophones and the francophones who came from Europe and built the country along with our aboriginals.

Canada has taken the position that we are a bilingual country and services will be delivered in both languages. We are working hard with all our communities to help them to learn those two languages and serve Canadians all across the country. We have done good work.

Representatives from Canadian Parents for French, for example, came to our committee meetings and talked with us. They said that they wanted more schools so their children could learn a second language. They asked for that the opportunity. We went across the country and we heard the same message.

Right now in British Columbia the Chinese community is learning both English and French. We have a beautiful country. However, some places are violating the law by not doing what they are supposed to according to the Official Languages Act under part VII, articles 41, 42 and 43. They are not promoting bilingualism. Nor are they respecting it. The recourse is to go to the courts.

The minute the law is broken, the only place where it can be fixed is the court. That is why we have judges and courts. The government decided it was going to put all people on a level playing field. To do that, we had the court challenges program.

The court challenges program has never abused its duties. The people administering the program were brought before the

committee and they explained the program. No one could say the program was being abused.

The budget contained about \$2 million for the court challenges program. The good work that it had done was very good. It was a big mistake for the government to get rid of it. It was a human mistake. The government does not see it as a mistake. It does not believe in it. It is a big mistake for our country to have a government that is trying to tear us apart instead of bringing us together. The Conservative government has done that by shutting down the court challenges program, which gave an opportunity for people to be respected in country that we love.

● (1825)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to know what my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst thinks of the fact that, in May 2006, the present government stated before the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights that the court challenges program was an excellent program that helped the disadvantaged in our society, minority groups, to stand up for their rights. The government made that statement in May 2006 at the United Nations and, a few months later, in September of that same year, it slashed the program.

I would like to hear the member's opinion on that.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his question.

I think the Conservative government—and I hope the minorities are listening—wants to show the entire world that it is a good government that respects the communities. However, let us look at the facts and not just at the court challenges program. There are the status of women programs that the Conservatives cut funding to. There are also the literacy programs. They have delivered a blow to the least fortunate, those who are in need.

I think this government does not believe in communities. However, they want to prove that they believe in the francophonie. They keep saying they have given this or that, but in reality that is not what is happening in the communities. I think it is disrespectful toward Canada to go to the United Nations and say that we have a good court challenges program that works well and then a month later abolish it. Then when we wanted to study this program, the Conservative Party MPs turned around and put an end to the committee work. The situation got so bad that we had to ask for the chair of the committee to step down because he did not even want to hear the witnesses.

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Furthermore, two weeks ago, in the Standing Committee on Official Languages, I asked in a formal motion, which was passed by the majority of the committee members, that the minister responsible for official languages appear before the committee to explain all the programs and the plan of action for official languages. She refused. It is either a lack of competence or the Prime Minister of Canada told her not to appear before the committee, that the Prime Minister's Office sticks to its agenda and if she appeared before the committee, the media would find out and the fact that the Conservatives do not respect the communities would become public and not go over very well. I think that is the real reason she refused.

I would think the minister would like to appear before the committee. When one does good things, one likes to be able to explain and defend them. But she refused to come and defend herself. The Conservative government does not surprise me since it has always been against this. In the Standing Committee on Official Languages, every time we talked about minorities, the Conservatives asked how much the program might cost. They ask how much it costs.

Indeed, there is a relative cost to bilingualism, but it is a matter of respect for our communities that founded this country.

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question will be short because, knowing my colleague, the answer will be long.

I know there was a court case in Ottawa to save the Montfort Hospital. I know that a cabinet minister of the then Conservative provincial government is now Minister of the Environment. Since that court case was funded through the court challenges program, I imagine that the word Montfort is one that the Conservatives do not like to hear.

I would like to know if the member believes that the Montfort case could be the reason for abolishing this program.

• (1830)

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: That question was not as short as the hon. member said it would be, so very briefly, the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, maybe the member was jealous of the time I would have to answer and that is why his question was long. I will try to give a brief answer.

First I want to thank my colleague for his question. He is absolutely right. The Harris team is now part of the Conservative government here, at the federal level. We saw what happened with the Montfort Hospital court case. It did not make the news only here in Ottawa and in Ontario, but across the country. The Montfort case was extremely important to francophone communities in Ottawa and in Ontario. The Minister of the Environment, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Health were involved in the Montfort case. The court challenges program left a very sour taste in their mouths. So it certainly could be one of the reasons for abolishing this program.

I also think that the Conservative government does not believe in the equality of French and English, our country's two languages.

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe.

It is a pleasure for me to rise and speak in the debate this evening. I was told it would be this evening and I definitely wanted to participate, even though I am no longer on the Standing Committee on Official Languages. I have had personal experiences that enable me to attest to the effects of the court challenges program on our community in St. Boniface.

I was on the Standing Committee on Official Languages for the last five years and greatly miss it. I thought I would do something different this year and am now on the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology. However, I try to replace that as much as possible because this is a subject that is really close to my heart.

The community in St. Boniface is the largest francophone community west of the Outaouais. It is actually quite impressive and quite unique in western Canada. About 45,000 people in Manitoba are native French speakers, which may not be a lot, but there are 110,000 people who speak French. There are more francophiles, therefore, than native francophones thanks to immersion programs that have been very successful in our region.

For example, we have such institutions as the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface, which has an international reputation and attracts people from all over. We have economic development corporations that are the envy of other communities all across Canada. There is the Centre culturel franco-manitobain and the Festival du Voyageur in the riding next to mine, which you represent, Mr. Speaker. I hope you had a chance to sample it last week. It is something that is very special to us. These institutions did not arise by accident but because people fought for them.

Not that long ago, maybe 25 or 30 years ago, Manitoba was not so sympathetic to our cause. There is a real difference today. Twenty-five or 30 years ago, however, they burned down the Société franco-manitobaine building in St. Boniface and threatened to kill the director. This was not 100 years ago but a mere 25. For a minority that is just 4% of the population of Manitoba, programs that put us on an even footing with the government when it comes time to defend our cause are very important to us. I can tell the House personally that our community has benefited greatly from these programs.

For four years, I was the only francophone member west of Sudbury. This is not something to brag about; it is really something to be embarrassed about. That is how it was. Today, we have a new francophone colleague with us, the NDP member for Victoria. It would be nice to have more, from any party. This is something on which progress absolutely has to be made in western Canada.

I also participated in the cross-Canada tour with Mr. Godin. I did not visit every city, but I took part in the meetings in about half of them. People did talk about cutbacks in literacy and all sorts of programs. But the most important one for francophones in minority communities was the court challenges program. It was the first topic raised every time, but the government did not want to talk about it. They said they were not talking about it because it was finished.

Routine Proceedings

The problem is certainly not one of money, because the program costs no more than \$5 million over two years, or \$2.5 million a year. It was not hundreds of millions of dollars. So this is a question of ideology. This is the government violating the rights not only of francophones, but also of persons with a disability, women and multicultural communities. You cannot just eliminate programs because you think, ideologically, that this is not in line with our thinking. When it is a question of fundamental rights, we absolutely have to preserve them and fight for them. I think that is what we are doing here tonight.

The Conservatives cannot know what the repercussions of all this are for us in Manitoba. I would like to talk about a few cases that have arisen.

In 1890, the government decided to eliminate section 23, which protected both official languages in Manitoba. I do not know whether people know it, but at the time of Louis Riel, two official languages had been negotiated and instituted in Manitoba. That was something absolutely extraordinary, and everyone agreed to it. In 1890, however, the government of the day—I believe it was the Greenway government—decided to abolish French. Unilaterally, the government decided to abolish French in Manitoba. For 90 years, we had to deal with that injustice.

•(1835)

Finally, in 1979, Georges Forest, a Manitoban from St. Boniface, got a ticket and decided to fight it in court, to say that you could not have a ticket in English only and that he had a right to a trial in French. His case went all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada. I am sure that everyone in this House knows about the case. In any event, he is someone who is very respected and very well known to us in Manitoba.

Mr. Forest ultimately won his case. At the time, however, there was no court challenges program, and Mr. Forest ended up spending more than \$150,000 of his own money on the case. That was truly a shame. We cannot say that Mr. Forest went bankrupt, but he was never able to recoup what he had spent.

In addition, Mr. Forest had an insurance company. He received threats. People stopped working with him, and as a result he lost a lot of business, but to us he is a hero. We can imagine what would have happened if the Court Challenges Program had existed. Ultimately, after our rights had been violated for 90 years, Mr. Forest rectified the situation, and so both official languages are now respected in Manitoba.

There was also the Bilodeau case in 1986. Once again, Mr. Bilodeau was not funded because the program did not start until 1994. Mr. Bilodeau fought a ticket and we dealt with the consequences of the Government of Manitoba not wanting to allow a challenge in French. So we spoke about the consequences of the Bilodeau case.

We also had the Rémillard case, which just ended this year. Once again, it dealt with the responsibilities of the Government of Manitoba. These are all very important things.

The most important is probably the case of the Franco-Manitoban School Division, or DSFM. After their rights had been trampled on for 90 years, people said they had a right to their own school

divisions and education system and were entitled to control their own curriculum in French. The courts decided in our favour.

Finally, after all these years, the DSFM used the court challenges program. I do not know how an institution without a lot of money could have taken on the government with its unlimited funding. Once again, the DSFM won.

There have also been some very famous cases outside Manitoba: the Beaulac case, the Mahé case and the Arseneault-Cameron case. All these cases are extremely important. They were funded by the court challenges program and would not have gone as far as they did without it.

When I found out that the Conservative government had decided to discontinue this program—a large sign behind us said that the surplus was \$14 billion and they were going in front of the microphones to announce the elimination of this program costing \$2.5 million a year in a step that trampled on the rights of minorities in Canada—I thought it was totally unacceptable. It made my heart sink.

When the Treasury Board president appeared before the committee, we asked him about it. He said it was not money well spent and the lawyers had really taken advantage of it. That is totally false and unacceptable. The lawyers who worked on these cases did so for next to nothing. I agree entirely, therefore, with my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst on this issue.

There is also some talk about possibly reinstating the program. A member from the Conservative Party said that maybe it could be reinstated only for language issues. I do not approve of that, not at all. I consider that it would be unacceptable for us, as francophones who have been oppressed and whose rights have been abused during all those years, to accept that without taking into account the women, the handicapped persons and the multicultural communities. I for one would not vote for that. I want the Court Challenges Program reinstated for all minority groups. That is a point I wanted to emphasize today.

In concluding, I will say that in yesterday's budget, in spite of all consultations in all parts of Canada by Mr. Bernard Lord and in spite of all the fanfare about the renewal of the official languages action plan the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages has been bragging about, we can see the true nature of the Conservative Party's commitment to official languages.

•(1840)

There is nothing at all in the budget. It remains to be determined. We can see the true colours of the Conservatives when the issue of official languages comes up.

I am pleased to have spoken to that subject tonight.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary for Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are trying to speak vigorously for official language minority communities but, really, they lack credibility.

Routine Proceedings

I would like to mention that, in our 2007 budget, we had announced an additional amount of \$30 million over two years for the official language minority communities. How did the Liberal Party vote? It voted against this positive measure. The Liberal Party also decreased by almost \$100 million the funding for official languages between 1994 and 1999. This is incredible.

Just recently, Justin Trudeau, the Liberal star candidate, was saying that Canadians who do not learn a second language are lazy. What an insult. That is an insult for the 22 million unilingual anglophones and francophones in the country.

I have a question for my friend opposite. Is Justin Trudeau the spokesperson for the Liberal Party? This is really an important question because he is a star candidate and he displays a very negative attitude towards the official language minority communities.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Mr. Speaker, I cannot wait to see the member explain this to his constituents, who are primarily francophone. That would be interesting. I would even like to be there, because I can assure you that all the promises his party made will be thrown back in their faces. It will not be long.

The member mentioned \$30 million. We are talking about a commitment of \$751 million over five years, and the funds increased. So in the financial structure, we are talking about nearly \$1 billion in the last year; not \$30 million. The Conservatives are laughing at francophones.

My colleague will hear about the calls I made today to minority francophone communities. I can assure him that they are very disappointed about all the promises made, all the consultations done by Mr. Lord and the big show they put on. I can assure him that there will be major consequences.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from Saint Boniface for the points he made. The Conservative member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell gives us an idea of the Conservative government's attitude. He thinks that since the Conservative government invested \$30 million in official languages in 2007, it has the right to violate the legislation. Citizens should not take their fight in court, and if they decide to do so, it is up to them to pay the expenses. That is exactly what he is saying.

In the case that was heard Monday and Tuesday in Fredericton, the government's lawyers were clear. They are asking that, if they win the case—it is in their request, which I have with me—the complainant should have to pay all the expenses. Not only did the government scrap the court challenges program, but the government's lawyers are asking that all their expenses be paid. Lawyers for the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada have said that this could cost between \$25,000 and \$30,000.

The government tells us that it supports official languages. As I said earlier, it went as far as to say that it is not the mandate of the courts to tell the government how to spend public funds. Thus, what it is really saying is that it has the right to violate the legislation. The government does not want citizens to defend themselves, but if they do so, it does not want a judge to decide against it, because it is up to the court to tell the government how to spend its money.

I would like to have—

● (1845)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Saint-Boniface.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments.

He is absolutely right. First of all, I was told that the lawyers defending this case in Fredericton are working for free. It truly is the ultimate insult for the government to also ask for its costs to be paid. That is completely unacceptable.

Naturally, this is quite in keeping with the government's recent conduct. In the matter of rights, cost should not matter. There was mention of \$5 million over two years. For the government, it is a question of ideology. It bothers them a great deal because they believe it is a waste of money and that no one should challenge its actions.

This is evident in the Conservatives' every move. If someone disagrees, the Conservatives ignore them, fire them and get rid of them.

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am taking part in the debate today as a citizen of New Brunswick, the only officially bilingual province in Canada, and also as a citizen of Moncton, the first officially bilingual city in Canada—although I have a great deal of respect for the citizens of Bathurst.

I am in favour of adopting this second report by the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Not only was I a member of that committee when we traveled through western Canada, but it was also the first time that the Standing Committee on Official Languages had traveled so that it could get a clear understanding of the needs of francophone communities outside New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario.

This caused me some concern, because I heard these groups say that they need a lot of important things when it comes to education and health care, but the number one thing on the list is to preserve the program we are talking about here. I was not so much concerned as surprised to see that the response was always the same, in Regina, in Edmonton, in Vancouver and in Winnipeg: the primary need is to preserve this program. I was also concerned to hear the Parliamentary Secretary, the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, ask a question without mentioning the court challenges program at all.

Obviously this government does not like that program. I do not know the reason behind that denial, but I can guess where it comes from: they oppose it because the Minister of the Environment, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Health were involved in the Montfort case.

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There is an award called the Prix Montfort. It is the symbol of the struggle to preserve francophone language rights in Canada. Every year, there is a big ceremony where the Prix Montfort is awarded. I know because the City of Moncton has won the prize. I had no knowledge of the Montfort case, but I know a lot more about it now because francophones in the Ottawa area fought against the closing of that hospital under the Harris regime, which included those three ministers. The struggle ultimately led to a huge success, thanks to the court challenges program.

It seems obvious to me that this is the reason why the government decided to eliminate the program. It is not a question of cost. At the Standing Committee on Official Languages meetings, we heard that out of the entire program, the part that goes to preserving language rights accounts for only \$400,000. This week, Fredericton's lawyers argued for two days before a Federal Court judge against the government that wants to eliminate this federal program, which costs \$400,000.

• (1850)

[English]

I need to speak a bit about that court case that just finished. All the pleadings in the public view amounted to saying that this program was called useful by agents of the government before the United Nations. It was one of the best programs for safeguarding our linguistic rights and other minority rights. It only costs about \$400,000, so it cannot be an issue of waste or the high cost involved in the program.

The duty in administrative law, which is very well-known from the Baker case forward, says that stakeholders, people who have a stake in the elimination of a government program, would normally have a reasonable expectation of consultation if a program were to be eliminated. Can anyone imagine shutting down medicare and not consulting doctors and nurses? It would not happen. There would be consultations.

The only consultation that took place in this case was when the member for Acadie—Bathurst, the member for Saint Boniface and the other members of the committee travelled, for the first time in the history of the committee, throughout parts of Canada where there were minority language groups. These groups told us that their number one concern was the re-establishment of the court challenges program. There was no consultation whatsoever by the government and yet that is the number one duty in administrative law.

It is very clear that the champion of the court challenges program ought to have been the heritage minister. Looking at successive budget documents and successive press releases from the minister of heritage at the time, it is very clear that there was no champion there. That minister was not protecting the linguistic rights of minorities in this country.

Vibrant communities, such as Saint Boniface, Edmonton, Vancouver and Regina, are holding on to their language rights, whereas they could have asked Parliament for more money and more support for their schools and their health centres, which they did because there is the second round of the Dion plan that needs to be properly funded, not the pittance that was given in the first budget of the Conservative government. However, the number one concern for

those communities was the protection of a legal vehicle called the court challenges program.

[Translation]

I wonder why? Because people in these communities know that it is vital and important to safeguard these rights. Money flows from these rights.

I listened to the member from Saint Boniface. I learned that, in 1870, in the province of Manitoba, the government eliminated the right to service in both languages. That bothers me a great deal perhaps because without past and future heroes, and without the court challenges program, we will step back in time. If we have a language right—no matter which one—we must fight each day, each morning, to protect that right.

I come from Acadia. I am not Acadian. I am Irish, Canadian in fact, but I know very well that, throughout history, Acadians fought governments and institutions for language rights in order to obtain health, education and other services in both official languages.

For that reason, our Constitution states that New Brunswick is a bilingual province. That is why I speak French in this Parliament, even though I bear an Irish name. It is because of the bilingual institutions of my province.

In closing, I would like to thank Messrs. Michaud and Doucet, the lawyers who have volunteered their services and are defending this case in court this week. I am certain that they will win the case. The government has many changes to make because if we have rights the court will recognize them. The constitutional rights, the language rights of official language minority communities are greater and stronger than the politics of this government.

• (1855)

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague, who is a strong advocate for minority rights on the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

I would like to know what he thinks about the following. We heard the member for Saint Boniface say that it took 90 years to bring French schools to Manitoba. It took 56 years, after they were abolished by Regulation 17, to have French schools at all levels in Ontario. It took 64 years in Saskatchewan. And all of this happened before the court challenges program.

By abolishing the court challenges program, could we not end up back in the dark days when francophone minorities were losing their rights in instances where they were very much in the minority, because the majority, much like the Conservatives today, could not care less?

Mr. Brian Murphy: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Gatineau.

The question is clear. Yes, I think there may a risk of problems in the future. Let us not forget that delivering services in both languages is not so easy because it costs the governments money. In a context of budgetary pressures, governments in this country—and one government has already made up its mind—might decide to eliminate programs.

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That is why it is very important to preserve these programs because we may need them to protect existing legislation. You never know when a provincial Conservative government might cut bilingual services. That will never happen in New Brunswick because we have constitutional guarantees, but it might happen in Ontario. The City of Ottawa is not a bilingual city and Ontario is not bilingual either.

[English]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary for Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I listened to my colleague, I could not help but think of the hypocrisy of the Liberal Party. I will put this into contrast. As I mentioned before, when the Liberals were in power from 1994 to 1999, they cut \$100 million out from under the feet of official language communities across Canada.

In contrast, the budget for the action plan, up until the end of this year, was \$750 million. Our government will have spent over \$800 million.

[Translation]

This is a \$50 million increase instead of a \$100 million cut.

[English]

The other contrast is that in budget 2007 we put forward additional funding for official language communities in the neighbourhood of \$30 million. That is a positive step. My colleague talked about \$400,000. I am not sure where he got his numbers but I am talking about \$30 million.

It is nice to have debates and to argue our points back and forth but we all speak loudest as MPs when we stand and vote. How did that member and the Liberal Party vote when it came to increasing the budget for official language communities by \$30 million? They voted no to that.

I would like to know how my colleague can explain this hypocrisy to me and particularly to Canadians who live in official language communities. It just does not make any sense.

● (1900)

Mr. Brian Murphy: Mr. Speaker, I understand the member's problem. He is in a government that is not francophone rights friendly and he is in a riding where he is in a fight, where he has to seem to be francophone rights friendly.

I understand the problem. I understand why he asks questions about funding of the Dion plan and does not ever address the topic tonight, the preservation of the court challenges program. He has not addressed it once in his questions but, presumably, he will eventually give an answer.

However, is he in favour of preserving the program or not? Does he think that linguistic rights are important or not? Does he think that the Dion plan was named after someone who is not the Leader of the Opposition now? Does he think that the Official Languages Act, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and bill 88 were all Conservative programs?

He is wrong. His party does not have the heritage or the culture of embracing official bilingualism and he is in the fight of his life. I understand why he has to stand there and pretend that he is in favour

of official languages and the Dion plan. I know at committee he is always trying to find a loophole to fight against those rights. I understand his problem.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this evening we are talking about the court challenges program. In September 2006, the Conservative government announced that the court challenges program would be abolished, in order to save a measly \$5.6 million. A large number of organizations condemned these cuts, and rightly so.

That program was created to allow individuals and citizens' groups to be on a level playing field when going to court against a government because they feel it is interfering with one or several of their constitutional rights.

Let us not forget that when citizens must take the government to court to seek justice, the latter has a slew of lawyers at its service, while ordinary citizens must use their own savings to defend themselves. Since court costs are huge, these people could rely on the court challenges program to balance things out, so that both sides would be represented fairly.

Fairness—yes, fairness—requires that each and everyone be entitled to full and fair representation before the courts. This principle is incredibly easy to understand, except for those killers of justice that Conservative governments, both federal and provincial, are in Canada.

The current government, which is made up of quite the mix of Reform, Alliance, neo-Liberal, Conservative and failed Liberal members, is suggesting that—listen to this—it will never violate the Constitution and, therefore, that citizens do not need a court challenges program. However, abolishing this program is, in and of itself, a violation of the law. So, this is a fine example of hypocrisy.

The government violated the legislation not on one or two points, but on five grounds.

First of all, the decision to eliminate the court challenges program goes against the contribution agreement reached between the Department of Canadian Heritage and the court challenges program, with respect to the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada.

Second, the decision goes against the constitutional principle of respect for and protection of minorities.

Third, the government has an obligation to act in favour of minorities, under section 16 of the Canadian Charter that was passed right here.

Fourth, the decision also contravenes the federal government's obligation to official language minority communities.

Fifth, the decision contravenes part VII of the Official Languages Act, particularly sections 41, 42 and 43.

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Furthermore, the Commissioner of Official Languages reviewed 118 complaints received in 2006 and 2007 regarding the elimination of the court challenges program. In his final report, submitted on October 9, 2007, to the complainants and government stakeholders involved, he urges the current government to reconsider its decision to slash the court challenges program and other programs that serve linguistic minorities, failing which it could face other court cases.

There is a serious paradox here. When the current federal government appeared before the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in May 2006, it extolled the value of the program and acknowledged how important it was to maintain it because of the legal issues that still had to be addressed. The very government that praised the program in May 2006 turned around and eliminated it in the fall of 2006. Some wires crossed and there was a short circuit. How unfortunate. Listen closely to what it said about the program. This is from the Conservative government before us here today:

● (1905)

The court challenges program, funded by the Government of Canada, provides funding for test cases of national significance in order to clarify the rights of official language minority communities and the equality rights of historically disadvantaged groups. An evaluation of the [court challenges program] in 2003 found that it has been successful in supporting important court cases that have a direct impact on the implementation of rights and freedoms covered by the program. [The individuals and groups benefiting from the [court challenges program] are located in all regions of the country and generally come from official language communities or disadvantaged groups, such as Aboriginal people, women, racial minorities, gays and lesbians, etc.] The Program has also contributed to strengthening both language and equality-seeking groups' networks. The Program has been extended to March 31, 2009.

Yet that same government went on to abolish the program in the fall of 2006. I heard the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell say the word “hypocrisy”. I get the sense that he does not really know what that word means, because the government itself is the hypocrite here.

Representatives of various organizations expressed their consternation to the Standing Committee on Official Languages after the government announced that it was going to abolish the program. The Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario, the Fédération des associations de juristes d'expression française de common law, the French Language Health Services Network of Eastern Ontario, Saskatchewan's francophone school division No. 310, the Assemblée communautaire francophone, St. Thomas More College at the University of Saskatchewan, the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta, the Alliance Jeunesse-Famille de l'Alberta Society, the Réseau santé albertain, and the Société des Acadiens et des Acadiennes du Nouveau-Brunswick have all spoken out against this disgrace.

The société Maison de la Francophonie de Vancouver, the Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique, the Centre francophone de Toronto, the Association des municipalités francophones du Nouveau-Brunswick and the Association des parents francophones du Nouveau-Brunswick were also dismayed by the decision. I hope that the Conservatives will feel a sense of shame at hearing the long list of groups that are working hard to protect minorities, unlike the government, which is doing its best to undermine them.

The Société Saint-Thomas d'Aquin de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard, Réseau santé de la Nouvelle-Écosse, Conseil économique du Nouveau-Brunswick, Autorité régionale francophone du Centre-Nord No. 2, Fédération franco-ténoise and SOS Montfort have also expressed their disapproval. The current Minister of Health, Minister of Finance and Minister of the Environment did everything they could to shut down the Montfort hospital, the only francophone hospital in the province. They tried to shut it down, although it is a very well-managed hospital and sets an example for other Ontario hospitals when it comes to finances. But because it was a franco-Ontarian hospital, these individuals, under the Harris government, did everything they could to close the hospital. It is completely disgraceful.

All these groups appeared before the committee to show that the court challenges program is an ally in the fight against anyone trying to destroy the francophone minority fibre in this country.

Representatives from the Quebec English School Boards Association, the Association des parents francophones, the Commission nationale des parents francophones, the Quebec Community Groups Network and the Faculty of Law at the University of Moncton, just to name a few, all came to say that it was a very bad choice and was ideologically unacceptable.

In December 2007—not very long ago in the history of the world—in response to the objections to the abolition of the court challenges program, the Standing Committee on Official Languages recommended:

That the Government of Canada reinstate the Court Challenges Program or create another program in order to meet objectives in the same way.

● (1910)

This sort of recommendation reflects a desire to repair the unspeakable damage that has been done. Equity between people must be restored at all levels of government so that everyone can have access to all the legal avenues they need to defend their constitutional rights.

When it decided to eliminate the court challenges program, the current Conservative government said that the program was not cost-effective. This argument was shot down by the chair of the program in his brief to the committee. He said:

No one ever informed the people in charge of the program that it was being reviewed. No one contacted the staff or the members of the board of directors or asked for information about the program. What sort of a review was it? What were the findings? When it announced that it was cutting the program, the government did not refer to any findings to justify its decision.

This is definitely the wrong way to go about doing things.

It is clear that the court challenges program was abolished for purely ideological reasons. The Conservatives do not care a bit about minority rights. Lord Durham is their model, and they are discomfited by the French fact. The Conservatives are discomfited by minority groups such as disabled persons and gays and by organizations that defend new Quebecers and new Canadians, women's groups and organizations that defend minorities. The court challenges program helped all these groups. True to their pitiful track record when it comes to respecting minorities, the Conservatives simply abolished the program. This is completely unacceptable. I do not dare think about what a Conservative majority would do.

Routine Proceedings

Funding provided for a number of groups was an effective way to advance the human rights agenda in Canada and Quebec, in some cases, in the two areas the program targeted. Many of the cases funded by the program resulted in important language rights precedents in Canadian constitutional law. They made a significant contribution to official language minority rights in Canada.

For example, take the case of *Doucet-Boudreau v. Nova Scotia*, which was mentioned today. This was a case defended in Nova Scotia regarding the education rights of the Acadian minority under section 23.

I also referred to the *Montfort Hospital* case, which was about further developing and recognizing the unwritten constitutional principle of protecting minorities. First developed in the reference relating to the secession of Quebec, the court recognized that governments must first take into account the possible impact of their decisions on official language minorities.

In *Arsenault-Cameron v. Prince Edward Island*, the Supreme Court confirmed the important principle of true equality and its application in cases stemming from section 23.

There was also *R. v. Beaulac*, a case dealing with the right to be heard by a decision-maker in the official language of choice of the individual who understands that language.

With regard to the measure to create educational institutions comparable to those of the majority, this measure is now applied in a fair number of provinces and territories, such as Saskatchewan, Alberta, Manitoba, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick and the Northwest Territories.

It is very important to convey this to those opposite, who do not have the slightest idea of the damage they are inflicting. Do they truly care about an equal balance between the citizens and the government they face in pursuing the rights they consider to be theirs? Abolishing this program, which costs very little in terms of the annual federal budget of \$238 billion, is an ideological choice that crushes the weakest by depriving them of all the necessary tools that are at the disposal of the government, with its host of lawyers, when it goes to court to attempt to suppress minority rights.

• (1915)

Minorities have a right to defend themselves.

From 1994 to 2005, the court challenges program opened some 1,671 files in response to funding applications. The report states:

The panels [under the Court Challenges Program] approved funding in 1,099 cases (66%). There were 821 files approved relating to equality rights and 278 relating to language rights. A significant number of funding applications approved relating to equality rights fall into six areas: discrimination against Aboriginal peoples (174), general physical disabilities (104), sex (94), race (88) and sexual orientation (75). With respect to language rights, half of the funding requests approved pertaining to language rights involve education rights (143) and, to a lesser extent, language of work, communication and service rights (55).

Minorities are being told to forget about the court challenges program—obviously the Conservatives are the ones saying this—and to turn to small claims court. Something is wrong here.

Society, like the Constitution, is a living thing. It is constantly changing. In our legal tradition, what happened in the past helps

shape the future, but what is to be does not necessarily flow from an example in case law. That is why we must ensure the return, for good, of the court challenges program. Unlike the Conservatives, society changes, improves, faces new challenges. Rather than cling to hallowed ideological battles in an attempt to oppress people, the government should demonstrate openness and ensure that minorities of all stripes are guaranteed recognition before any party, including the state at federal, provincial and municipal levels.

People with disabilities won the battle for accessibility against public institutions thanks in part to funding from the court challenges program. Public institutions argued that the cost of installing ramps to enable such a small number of people to enter public and private buildings with ease was too high. Thanks to the court challenges program, people with disabilities won their fight. Now they have the ramps they need. Public institutions and many private ones now follow this rule and make sure that their buildings are accessible to people with disabilities.

French-language schools serving francophone minorities outside Quebec were closed in 1871 in New Brunswick; in 1890 in Manitoba; in 1912 in Ontario; and in 1931 in Saskatchewan. Those are just the cases I know of. Francophones did not get their schools back until 50, 60, even 80 years later. Assimilation wreaked havoc. Obtuse governments bent on making us disappear from the ethno-linguistic landscape came very close to succeeding.

The court challenges program must be brought back to ensure that things like this never happen again.

• (1920)

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Gatineau for his comments on the court challenges program.

And I would be remiss if I did not thank Mr. Michaud and Mr. Doucet in New Brunswick for the volunteer work they have done for the Acadians. They fought a battery of government lawyers. I tip my hat to them. Thank you on behalf of the Acadians and all the francophones and minorities in the country.

Bill S-3, which was passed by Parliament, was Senator Jean-Robert Gauthier's cause. He fought for it for years and presented the bill in the House of Commons three times. The bill was rejected the first two times, but the third time it passed. I remember that because, at the time, I had a lot of discussions with Conservative MPs, who were then in opposition, to find out whether they were going to support the bill. In the end, they did support it and they said they were proud to do so.

I would like the hon. member for Gatineau to give me his opinion on the following text:

This enactment amends the Official Languages Act to enhance the enforceability of the Government of Canada's obligations under Part VII of the Act.

Adjournment Proceedings

Part VII of the Act is now enforceable. What does “enforceable” mean? I would like the hon. member's opinion on that. Part VII of the Official Languages Act clearly states, in section 43(2):

The Minister of Canadian Heritage shall take such measures as that Minister considers appropriate to ensure public consultation in the development of policies and review of programs relating to the advancement and the equality of status and use of English and French in Canadian society.

Bill S-3 was intended to protect and enhance the law.

In its defence, the government clearly said that Bill S-3 did not change anything and that the court should not get involved in the government's decisions. That is outrageous and unacceptable. The government does not even respect the very legislation that was passed in this Parliament. The Conservatives, who were in opposition at the time, voted for a bill, but said that the bill did not mean anything. I would like the opinion of the hon. member for Gatineau on this.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Acadie—Bathurst, a proud Acadian, whom I very much respect.

One thing is certain: the current situation regarding the elimination of the court challenges program, as I said earlier, violates five aspects or provisions of the Constitution. Part VII is one of those aspects. The federal government, before making a decision, must consult the interested parties, the minorities affected. We know full well, and this has been shown in committee, that the Conservative government did not consult anyone before shamefully eliminating a program that had proven effective in helping minorities, in every sense of that word.

This situation must be denounced, and that is what we are doing here today. The binding constitutional aspect has been violated by the Conservatives' decision not to comply with the Official Languages Act.

• (1925)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary for Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, we see the hypocrisy of the Bloc Québécois.

In August, the Bloc member for Ahuntsic asked that all immigrants to Quebec choose French, because Quebec is the only place in North America where French is spoken. If you prefer English, you can go to Canada or the United States. This is a remarkable thing to say. I would like to remind my hon. colleague that the minority official language in Quebec is English. I would like to know if my colleague and the members of the Bloc Québécois will protect the rights and heritage of anglophones in Quebec.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Speaker, the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, who just spoke, represents the riding where I was born and used to live, like my colleague from Hull—Aylmer. It is a riding where the francophones, the Franco-Ontarians, are very proud of their heritage.

My father, who is now 89, saw the abolition of French-language schools in Ontario by regulation 17. My sisters could not go to French high school because by 1968 they had finished their schooling. Prior to that, there were no French-language secondary schools.

As a Franco-Saskatchewaner and a Franco-Ontarian, I always dreamed of having the same rights and the same protection in Quebec as my anglophone brothers and sisters. Bill 101 protects anglophones in Quebec better than all the legislation for minorities introduced by the Conservatives in this government and the Mulroney government, which was the first government to abolish this program.

The word “hypocrite” aptly describes this government, because that is exactly what it is. It is taking rights away from people. Yet in Quebec, the government has never abolished any English-language schools. In 1977, René Lévesque even allowed 11 first nations to have schools in their own language wherever their communities were located. The Conservatives have never done that.

In Saskatchewan, the Conservatives abolished French-language schools. In 1988, the government of Grant Devine even abolished all French-language services in Saskatchewan. I am not talking about ancient history. In Quebec, no party—not the Parti Québécois or the Liberal Party or the party of Lesage or the party of Lévesque—ever abolished anything or took away any rights from anglophone Quebecers.

The member should bone up on his history, because it is shameful for him to ask such a question.

• (1930)

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Order. It being 7:30 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today the question is deemed put and a recorded division is deemed demanded. Pursuant to Standing Order 66 the division stands deferred until Wednesday, March 5 at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*Translation*]

ELECTION FINANCING

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise here today to ask the government to stop obstructing the work of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. That committee is trying to shed some light on the Conservative Party's so-called in and out scam during the last election.

I am quite certain that the members across the floor would much rather sweep this problem under the rug, but Canadians have a right to know how the Conservatives tried to hoodwink them. They want to know how they maliciously manipulated the system in order to stay within the election spending limits required by law.

Adjournment Proceedings

During the last election, the Conservative Party transferred large sums of money into the bank accounts of several local candidates. The same party then took back the money to invest it in national advertising. It knew that it had spent the maximum allowed by law, but it decided, quite deliberately, to exceed the legal limits. The other parties, however, obeyed the law as noted by Elections Canada.

Many defeated and elected candidates as well as several official agents were involved in the Conservative Party's scheme. They allegedly asked for a refund from Elections Canada and included amounts that artificially inflated their expenses. That is fraud. A defeated candidate who spent just \$3,000 more than the approximate amount of \$24,000 received from the in and out scheme claimed 60% from Elections Canada. The latter rightly refused to reimburse them. The Associate Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Janice Vézina, explained the refusal in a written affidavit to the Federal Court.

The list of candidates who apparently participated in this scheme included several ministers, such as the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages and the Minister of Foreign Affairs as well as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Status of Women, the Secretary of State (Agriculture), the Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, and the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles. A daily newspaper also mentioned the name of the Minister of Public Safety who, of all the candidates, should be above suspicion. Closer to me, the Conservative candidate for Hull-Aylmer reportedly participated in this scheme. The ads were placed in Quebec.

The office of the chief electoral officer revealed that official representatives of Conservative candidates had said that the discrepancies were simply an in-and-out scheme designed to enable the federal party to fund more advertising. Elections Canada's affidavit points out examples of striking differences between amounts booked by Conservative candidates and those booked by the Conservative Party for the same ads.

The minority Conservative government tried to impede the work of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. The Conservatives denied accusations of cheating during the last election, then they attacked and blocked everyone who was trying to shed light on the issue. Over the past two years, they loudly proclaimed their zeal for transparency, but now the party is all about covering things up.

Will the government cease its machinations to prevent these allegations from being examined in the light of day? Will the government acknowledge its wrongdoing and allow the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to go about its business as usual?

• (1935)

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I begin to rebut all of the arguments made by my hon. colleague, I would be remiss if I did not thank my hon. colleague and all of his colleagues in the Liberal Party for their unwavering support of this government over the course of the last few days, particularly in terms of the budget. Of course, before that there was the Afghanistan motion to extend the

mission until 2011. Most recently was their support of Bill C-2, the tackling violent crime act.

I can honestly say that without the continued support of the Liberal Party on government initiatives, we really would not be able to make as much progress as we have seen over the course of the last two weeks or so. Again, I thank the hon. member. I urge him to continue that level of support we have seen because this is what makes Parliament work, a strong government abided and abetted by an opposition party that wants to see Canadians of all political levels benefit. I thank my colleague so much for all of the invaluable support we have seen.

I would love to see that same level of support when it comes to the motion we have presented in the procedure and House affairs committee. The motion is that we would voluntarily open up our books to examine all of our advertising practices for the last several years. I must add, we are the only party that has voluntarily offered that type of examination. Of course, there is only one caveat that we place upon that, which is that all parties, not just the Conservative Party, but all parties do the same and open up their books. However, we have found time and time again in the procedure and House affairs committee that the opposition members, particularly the member opposite and his party, have refused to accommodate such a motion.

I have consistently stated, at great lengths I must add, that I do not believe that any other party in this House has ever done anything wrong when it comes to the advertising practices in elections past. I have also taken great pains to point out that the advertising practices employed by the Conservatives are exactly the same as those employed by members of the Liberal Party, the New Democratic Party and the Bloc.

I am suggesting if they were able to examine all of our books in the light of day, we would certainly find that in our opinion Elections Canada has erred in its ruling that there was perhaps something wrong with the so-called in and out scheme. As I pointed out at committee, everything the Conservative Party has done is in complete compliance with electoral law.

I believe that my hon. colleague knows that and that is the reason he and his colleagues are refusing an examination of their own books. I can think of no other reason, other than the fact that they may have something to hide and I would hope that not be the case.

Once again, I thank my hon. colleagues for all of their support on the budget and other initiatives this government has brought forward. I look forward to continued support over the upcoming weeks, months and perhaps even years as they sit in opposition. I hope my hon. colleague will have second thoughts about supporting us on our motion we brought forward to the procedure and House affairs committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Speaker, as you have just heard, instead of admitting that what they did was wrong, the Conservatives have decided to take the matter to court to prevent us from uncovering the truth, the whole truth, before the next election. Moreover, the Conservative Party will force Canadians to pay the legal costs of this pointless case against Elections Canada.

Adjournment Proceedings

How many times has the Prime Minister said that Canadians deserve accountability? Now it is his turn to demonstrate transparency and to open his party's books. He must say whether the "in and out" money exceeded the limits set by the Canada Elections Act. He must say whether the "in and out" scheme gave the Conservative Party and some of its candidates access to reimbursements they were not entitled to.

When will this government stop its stalling tactics? When will this government allow the committee to examine the allegations against the Conservatives?

• (1940)

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, let me just say that we also believe in complete transparency and that is why we brought forward the court action. What better forum to examine in totality the advertising practices and the advertising books of the Conservative Party than in a court of law.

The member opposite does not want that kind of approach to ever take place. The Liberals do not want the truth, perhaps not because they cannot handle the truth, but because they want to alter the truth. They want a kangaroo court rather than a true court. That is why they are trying to attempt through the procedure and House affairs committee an examination of only one party. Not only is that not fair, as the opposition leader was fond of saying in years past, but it is not believable when we hear the words coming from the member opposite that they want complete transparency. If they truly wanted transparency, they would accommodate our motion and allow all parties' books to be examined.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24 (1).

(The House adjourned at 7:41 p.m.)

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