



CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Thursday, April 3, 2008**

—

**Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, April 3, 2008

The House met at 10 a.m.

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*Prayers*

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● (1005)

[English]

## POINTS OF ORDER

RESPONSE TO ORAL QUESTION

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):**

Briefly, Mr. Speaker, if I may, I want to correct an answer I gave in the House yesterday. In an answer to a question on one of the immigration issues, I indicated that the Chinese head tax originally was introduced by a Liberal government. That in fact is not the case. The head tax was introduced in 1885. I want to correct the record in that regard: it was not introduced under a Liberal government.

I obviously confused it with Laurier's government, which increased the size of that head tax tenfold, and of course the 1923 Chinese immigration act that banned all Chinese immigration to Canada, which happened under King's Liberal government. I want to make sure the record is corrected. It was not introduced under a Liberal government originally.

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

\* \* \*

### INCOME TAX ACT

**Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-532, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (low-cost residential rental property).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table today a private member's bill entitled an act to amend the Income Tax Act (low-cost

residential rental property). The bill is seconded by my colleague, the member for Victoria, and stems from her deep interest in and work to find solutions to the affordable housing crisis in Canada and from her experiences as a city councillor in Victoria and member of Parliament for that city. The member for London—Fanshawe has also worked to develop this bill.

The bill proposes to amend the Income Tax Act to provide a tax incentive to encourage landlords to invest in the purchase of low-cost residential rental property. It calls on the government to develop regulations which would allow for the rollover of recaptured depreciation on the sale of rental property in cases where the proceeds from the sale of such property are reinvested in the purchase of low-cost rental property in the same year.

It is the intention of this legislation to encourage the maintenance of and stimulate an increase in the stock of affordable rental housing in Canada. Affordable rental housing is key to the needs of many Canadians and their families.

This measure is only a small part of an approach to dealing with the affordable housing crisis in Canada. No single measure and certainly no measure as specific as this one can replace the need for a national housing program that actually builds affordable housing in Canada. Tax measures, building programs: no stone should be left unturned in finding a solution to the housing crisis.

The member for Victoria and I believe this measure is one that deserves the serious consideration of the House and that is why we are tabling this bill today.

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

\* \* \*

### PETITIONS

SECURITY AND PROSPERITY PARTNERSHIP

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table two petitions today. The first comes from dozens of people in my riding in the greater Hamilton area who are against the proposed security and prosperity partnership. They call upon the Government of Canada to stop further implementation of the security and prosperity partnership of North America with the United States and Mexico until there is a democratic mandate from the people of Canada, parliamentary oversight, and consideration of its profound consequences on Canada's existence as a sovereign nation and its ability to adopt autonomous and sustainable economic, social and environmental policies.

*Routine Proceedings*

These petitioners represent just a small number of the tens of thousands of Canadians who are counting on the government to listen to their concerns and stop the SPP.

## TAXATION

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** The other petition, Mr. Speaker, that I am pleased to table today is yet again on the urgent need for the House to adopt Bill C-390. The bill would allow tradespeople and indentured apprentices to deduct travel and accommodation expenses from their taxable income so that they can secure and maintain employment at construction sites that are more than 80 kilometres from their homes.

This time the petitions have come from St. John's, Glace Bay, Sydney, Fredericton, Timmins, Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Val Caron, Sudbury, North Bay, Owen Sound, Windsor, Chatham, Port Elgin, Cambridge, Kitchener, London, Sarnia, Toronto, Brandon, Winnipeg, Moose Jaw, Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, Kamloops, Nelson, Castlegar, Victoria, Whitehorse, and of course the Golden Horseshoe, in an expression of support that is truly national in scope.

Unfortunately, another budget implementation bill that is before the House today ignores yet again this modest request by Canada's building trades. All they have been asking for is some basic fairness. I will continue to represent their issues in the House and will gladly introduce all of their petitions until the government finally lives up to its commitment to act.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I would remind hon. members, as far as is possible, to just present their petitions and not expand them in such a way as to raise questions in the House about the appropriateness thereof.

## VICTIMS OF CRIME

**Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I present a petition signed by 1,233 people from my riding of Red Deer and from Alberta. These citizens are outraged at the violent beating of a 61-year-old apartment caretaker by repeat offender Leo Teskey. The petitioners therefore demand that Parliament pass tougher laws regarding repeat and violent offenders and adequate compensation for victims of violent crimes.

## VISITOR VISAS

**Hon. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a petition signed by residents of my riding of Bramalea—Gore—Malton. The petitioners call upon the government to institute a system of visa bonds for temporary resident visa applicants wishing to come to Canada as members of the visitor class, to give immigration counsellors discretion over the creation of visa bonds, to establish minimum and maximum visa bond amounts as a guideline for immigration officials, and to allow the visa bond to apply to either the sponsor or the visitor.

## UNBORN VICTIMS OF CRIME

**Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very honoured today to present yet again over 1,500 names on a petition in support of my Bill C-484. These petitioners, recognizing that when a woman has chosen to have a child, the right and that child should not be taken away by violent means, ask Parliament to enact legislation that would make it a separate offence to cause the injury or death of an unborn child. Today's petition

brings the number of petitioners' signatures in support of this bill to over 13,000.

• (1010)

## SECURITY AND PROSPERITY PARTNERSHIP

**Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to present a petition that calls for the suspension of the security and prosperity partnership that is going on now. The petitioners, some 200 from the lower mainland region of Vancouver, are adding their names to the many thousands that have been presented by New Democrats here. They say that the implementation of the SPP further advances the goal of continental economic integration and that there is a very big concern around security, energy, food and health standards, and the shrinking opportunities for Canadian policy makers and governments.

They call on Parliament to stop further implementation of the SPP and ask for a democratic mandate from the people of Canada, for parliamentary oversight, and for consideration of its profound consequences on Canada's existence as a sovereign nation. They ask us to conduct transparent and accountable public debate on the SPP, involving meaningful public consultations and a full legislative review. These 200 names are added to the thousands that already have been presented by New Democrat members of Parliament on this very important issue for all Canadians.

## UNBORN VICTIMS OF CRIME

**Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate being able to present this petition before the last person to present. This petition today calls upon Parliament to enact legislation which would recognize unborn children as separate victims when they are injured or killed during the commission of an offence against their mothers, allowing two charges to be laid against the offender instead of just one. There are nearly 1,000 signatures on this petition and in polls we have seen clearly that 72% of Canadians support this important legislation, Bill C-484.

## INCOME TRUSTS

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this morning I am pleased to present yet another income trust broken promise petition from a number of signatories from Forestburg, Stettler, Calgary, Edmonton and Vegreville, Alberta. The petitioners want to remind the Prime Minister that he had promised never to tax income trusts but he recklessly broke that promise by imposing a 31.5%—

**An hon. member:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Paul Szabo:** Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate the assistance of the government House leader during my great presentation. I hope he will carry on, because it tells me that I am on the right track.

The petitioners say that the Prime Minister did recklessly break that promise by imposing a 31.5% tax, which permanently wiped out over \$25 billion of the hard-earned retirement savings of over two million Canadians, particularly seniors. We must remember our seniors.

The petitioners therefore call upon Parliament, and particularly the minority government, first, to admit that the decision to tax income trusts was based on flawed methodology and incorrect assumptions, as was demonstrated in the hearings before the finance committee; second, to apologize to those who were unfairly harmed by this broken promise; and finally, to repeal the punitive 31.5% tax on income trusts. This brings to 50,000 the number of names already submitted to the House with regard to this reckless broken promise.

\* \* \*

### 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 Deputy Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

\* \* \*

●(1015)

[Translation]

### POINT OF ORDER

RESPONSE TO ORAL QUESTION BY COMMITTEE VICE-CHAIR—SPEAKER'S RULING

**The Deputy Speaker:** Before proceeding to the orders of the day, I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised on Friday, March 7, 2008, by the hon. Government House Leader alleging the inappropriateness of the response provided by the Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, the hon. member for Hull—Aylmer, to an oral question raised by the hon. member for Churchill during oral questions that day.

[English]

I would like to thank the government House leader for raising this matter and the hon. member for Wascana for his intervention.

The government House leader contended that in response to a question posed by the member for Churchill regarding the agenda of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, the answer provided by the member for Hull—Aylmer was inappropriate because it was substantive and partisan and, therefore, did not follow the usual practice for this kind of response. He also added that this constituted a breach of the rules of the House that was deliberate and calculated.

The opposition House leader argued that the response given by the committee vice-chair was within the rules of the House since it referred explicitly to the agenda of the committee.

Let me begin by putting this point of order in context. It is well established that questions to committee chairs, with the emphasis on questions, should be strictly restricted to requests for information

### Speaker's Ruling

concerning matters of simple committee administration rather than the substance of their proceedings.

[Translation]

In a ruling on May 20, 1970, on page 7126 of the Debates, Mr. Speaker Lamoureux clearly defined the limits of this line of questioning when he stated:

... the only questions which are acceptable when directed to the chairman of a committee are questions which relate to procedural matters—whether a meeting is to be held, whether a committee will be convened, at what time a committee will be held, and so on; ... I think there has to be a very strict limit on questions that may be asked chairmen of committees.

Furthermore, House of Commons Procedure and Practice at page 429 states:

Questions seeking information about the schedule and agenda of committees may be directed to chairs of committees. Questions to the Ministry or a committee chair concerning the proceedings or work of a committee may not be raised.

[English]

Our practice in this regard seems quite clear.

In fact, as recently as February 12, the Speaker had occasion to address the issue of questions to committee chairs and hon. members will recall that he reminded the House of the narrow parameters of questions that are acceptable.

He also took the opportunity to underline the Chair's very limited powers in determining what constitutes an appropriate response to such a question. Specifically, he acknowledged that the Speaker was not the judge of the nature or quality of the response and that the Chair was, in the matter of responses to questions, limited to the language used. Thus, he stated in part:

If the response is not an answer to the question, I cannot rule the response out of order unless unparliamentary language is used in the response....

[Translation]

Accordingly, in the case complained of, while it appears that the response includes remarks that were unnecessary simply to provide information about the committee's schedule, in the view of the Chair, those remarks—superfluous to requirements as they may be—nonetheless cannot be construed as unparliamentary and so there are no grounds for ruling them out of order.

[English]

I confess that I am somewhat surprised to find the Chair being asked to examine the procedural acceptability of a response during question period. Whatever certain commentators may claim with regard to the prerogatives of the Speaker, the House of Commons has never, to my knowledge, required the Chair to be the arbiter of the appropriateness, completeness or even relevance of responses given to questions during question period. Hence, the old saw that this 45 minute period each day is called question period and not answer period.

### Government Orders

However, I must say that I have some sympathy with the concerns that continue to be expressed by members about this category of question. Questions to committee chairs, once rare and exceptional, have lately been used more frequently. This trend and the repeated procedural squabbling it has occasioned prompts me to inform the House that in future when considering the procedural acceptability of such questions, the Chair intends to demand strict adherence to the intended practice, namely, the scheduling and agenda of committee meetings. I am counting on the cooperation of all hon. members in this regard.

[Translation]

At the same time, I strongly encourage committee chairs or vice-chairs, who are the only members in a position to answer these kinds of questions, to do so in a spirit of fair play and in keeping with the very specific information-seeking strictures that apply to members asking these questions.

• (1020)

[English]

I thank the House for its attention.

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

### BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2008

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (for the Minister of Finance)** moved that Bill C-50, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 26, 2008 and to enact provisions to preserve the fiscal plan set out in that budget, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to lead off this second reading debate and speak on behalf of our Conservative government on Bill C-50, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 26, 2008 and to enact provisions to preserve the fiscal plan set out in that budget.

Bill C-50 reflects the responsible leadership provided by our Conservative government at home and abroad, leadership that gives Canadians good reason to be confident about the future, despite the economic uncertainty beyond our borders. In fact, we have the strongest fiscal position of any G-7 country.

That position has allowed the government to take important action in support of our long term economic plan entitled, Advantage Canada, a plan that was introduced in 2006 that benefits Canadians today and for the years ahead.

For example, the fall 2007 economic statement took important steps to jump-start the plan by providing broad based tax relief for individuals and business, vitally important measures totalling \$60 billion, prudent measures taken at the request of the finance minister and our Prime Minister in anticipation of impending global economic turbulence.

It is important to recognize the actions taken in the economic statement that have been recognized by a wide range of observers as

extremely important in the maintenance of Canada's solid economic fundamentals. Observers, like BMO's economist, Doug Porter, who said:

It was brilliantly timed. Just as the economy was running into serious heavy weather we had some serious fiscal stimulus.

The Conference Board of Canada noted that:

The Canadian economy will weather the storm of uncertainty...

...recent changes, such as tax reductions announced by the federal government... will maintain the momentum.

A recent *Calgary Herald* editorial praised the Conservative government for using the economic statement and stated:

...to strengthen consumer demand, notably the one per cent GST reduction....

...for once a government seems to have been ahead of the curve.

Additionally, we took further action through the \$1 billion community development trust, a program that assists workers and communities experiencing difficulty due to international economic volatility.

Budget 2008 directly builds on that important action. It confirms our commitment to strong fiscal management by reducing the federal debt by \$10.2 billion in 2007-08. It reduces taxes to the lowest level measured as a share of the economy since the Diefenbaker government. It invests in the future of Canada.

Budget 2008 will support Canada's economy with a plan that is real and one that is committed to responsible spending. Unlike the reckless Liberal opposition that would plunge Canada into a massive \$70 billion deficit, our Conservative government is committed to a balanced budget.

We have also made a commitment to Canadians to reduce taxes and we are proud to say that we are keeping that commitment. We are reducing taxes for all Canadians and we are proud of that.

To date, our Conservative government has taken actions that will provide nearly \$200 billion in broad based tax relief and \$140 billion of that relief will benefit individuals directly. These are permanent reductions that hard-working Canadians will see each and every time they file their income taxes. Taxes will continue to decline thanks to our government's tax-back guarantee. This represents our commitment to dedicate the effective interest savings from federal debt reduction each year to permanent and sustainable personal income tax reductions.

Moreover, I am privileged to be part of a Conservative government that introduced one of the single most important personal savings vehicles ever introduced, one which the C.D. Howe Institute described as a "tax policy gem": the tax-free savings account. This groundbreaking, flexible and general purpose account will allow Canadians to watch their savings grow tax free. It is an historical first for Canadians and here is how it works.

• (1025)

First, Canadians can contribute up to \$5,000 every year to a registered tax-free savings account, plus carry forward any unused portions to future years.

*Government Orders*

Second, the investment income, including capital gains earned in the plan, will be exempt from income tax, even when withdrawn.

Third, Canadians can withdraw from the account at any time without restriction. Better yet, there are no restrictions on what they can save for.

Finally, the full amount of withdrawals may be recontributed to their tax-free savings account in the future to ensure no loss in a person's total savings room.

The new tax-free savings account will help Canadians save for whatever is important to them. I would encourage Canadians to visit [www.fin.gc.ca](http://www.fin.gc.ca) to find out more about this innovative new program. There is an on-line calculator that will help them deal with this. This will demonstrate just how Canadians can save by investing in this tax-free savings account.

Let me share with my colleagues that the savings can be substantial. For example, assuming a modest 5.5% rate of return, a person contributing \$200 a month to one of these new accounts for 20 years could enjoy a tax savings of \$11,045 compared to saving in an unregistered account.

Of course, not everyone is able to save each and every year. Those who cannot contribute \$5,000 in a given year will be able to carry forward their unused contribution room to future years.

Saving can be difficult, especially for some low and modest income earners, which is why an important component of this proposed legislation is that there will be no clawbacks. This means that neither the income nor the capital gains earned in a tax-free savings account, nor the withdrawals from it, will affect eligibility for federal income tested benefits. As a result, the tax-free savings account will be of tremendous benefit to all Canadians.

The praise for this initiative has been almost universal. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation said:

This is an excellent policy proposal. Canada needs to reward people that save because their investments fuel economic growth and job creation.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business added that "it was an inspired measure".

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce heralded the measure, saying it will "encourage savings, a measure which the Chamber has sought for many years".

Bill C-50 has an important measure to benefit Canada's seniors, measures that build on earlier actions we have taken. Many seniors in Canada are living on a fixed income. This can sometimes make it difficult to make ends meet.

To help those Canadians, our Conservative government has taken action that provides about \$5 billion in tax relief each year for seniors and pensioners, including doubling of the pension income amount of \$2,000 and increasing the age credit amount by \$1,000.

We have also increased the age limit for maturing RPPs and RRSPs and, for the first time ever in Canada, introduced pension income splitting for seniors and pensioners.

We are continuing on that path to supporting seniors in Bill C-50 by increasing the guaranteed income supplement exemption to

\$3,500 from the current maximum of \$500. This means that seniors can earn up to \$3,500 before having any GIC benefits reduced. This measure will benefit low and modest income seniors who chose to continue working.

The Canadian Association of Retired Persons commends our Conservative government for "listening to many of its recommendations over the years and taking steps in the right direction".

The Conservative government is also committed to making Canada an even greater place to create and expand a business.

• (1030)

Last fall we set out a long term plan to reduce the federal corporate income tax rate to 15% by 2012. This 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 in the G-7 by 2012.

As the Canadian Council of Chief Executives declared, and I quote again, "The federal government clearly has done everything it can to reduce tax rates within the boundaries of prudent fiscal management".

We are also taking targeted action to assist Canada's manufacturers as they face challenging economic circumstances. For instance, in budget 2007 we brought in a temporary accelerated capital cost allowance. This measure is helping Canadian manufacturers make the investments needed to build modern facilities here at home to take on the world.

Budget 2008 proposes to extend temporary accelerated capital cost allowance treatment for three additional years. This extension will provide the manufacturing and processing sector with an additional \$1 billion in tax relief by 2012-13.

Bill C-50 contains proposed measures that will provide additional benefits to businesses in Canada. For example, small businesses can face challenges in accessing capital to finance research and development investments.

That is why an enhanced scientific research and experimental development, or SR&ED, with the investment tax credit of 35% will be available to small Canadian controlled private corporations on their first \$2 million of qualified expenditures.

During the prebudget consultations many stakeholders noted that access to the enhanced SR&ED investment tax credit is phased out quickly once the taxable capital threshold of \$10 million is reached. They suggested that medium-sized businesses should have access to some enhanced benefit. In addition, many suggested that the expenditure limit has not kept pace with technological innovations that have made startup research and development investment more costly.

*Government Orders*

In response to these concerns, Bill C-50 proposes to increase the expenditure limit from \$2 million to \$3 million and to increase the upper limit for the taxable capital phase-out range from \$15 million to \$50 million. The upper limit of the taxable income phase-out range will also be increased from \$600,000 to \$700,000. Increasing these limits will encourage small and medium-sized Canadian controlled private corporations to grow.

Canadians spoke and this government listened.

Budget 2008 includes new measures to strengthen and ensure the effective implementation of our government's plan to ensure a cleaner, healthier environment for all Canadians.

To that end, Bill C-50 proposes to commit \$250 million for carbon capture and storage projects. This will allow for harmful emissions to be stored underground rather than released into the atmosphere.

Public transit is one of the keys to achieving a cleaner and healthier environment. That is why our government, under the leadership of this excellent environment minister who is here with us today, has made significant investments in public transit infrastructure.

Bill C-50 goes even further by proposing an additional \$500 million to make further investments in public transit capital infrastructure. These are measures to encourage Canadians to leave their cars at home and assist Canada's municipalities.

The Canadian Urban Transit Association called this support, "a major boost to future access and mobility in Canadian communities". The Federation of Canadian Municipalities called it, "good news for cities and communities".

Canadians want a clean environment in which to live. They also want healthy and safe communities. To help ensure that safety, Bill C-50 proposes to build safer communities and put criminals out of business.

• (1035)

Speaking of putting some out of business, I want to take a moment to mention how damaging yesterday's NDP motion would have been had it passed. It would have put legitimate Canadians out of business. We do thank the Liberals for supporting and recognizing that it would have put Canadians out of work, and we do appreciate that support.

Most of all we do appreciate the fact that the Liberals did come and vote last night, but most of all, to support us. I look forward to seeing them in their place when it comes time to vote in favour of Bill C-50 as well.

The bill proposes to provide \$400 million to hire 2,500 new front line police officers over the next five years. Support recognized an important step in helping "address the much needed resources for tackling crime". That was said by the Canadian Police Association, who added that they were also very happy with the commitment that was in budget 2008.

Mr. Speaker, as you are no doubt starting to notice, this is a very comprehensive bill. Time does not permit me to describe all of the details of the measures in Bill C-50, but I would be remiss if I did not

mention certain initiatives in it that would help Canada prepare for the future, our youth.

First, in recognition of the importance of education in our future, the bill proposes a new consolidated Canada student grant program to take effect in the fall of 2009. All federal grants will be integrated into one program, a program which will provide more effective support to more students for more years of study. In doing so, this will assist Canadian families who struggle with the cost of higher education.

Bill C-50 proposes an investment of \$350 million in 2009-10, rising to \$430 million in 2012-13. Additionally, Canadian students and their families also need simple, effective, financial assistance programs. That is why budget 2008 commits \$123 million to streamline and modernize the Canada student loans program.

Measures will be put in place to improve service for students in a number of ways, such as: a new service delivery vision that will expand online services; more equitable supports for part time and married students; a new in-study, interest free period for reservists; and an enhanced flexibility for those students experiencing difficulty in debt repayment as well as including those with disabilities.

Canada's students responded enthusiastically to budget 2008. Groups like the College Student Alliance said, "It showed that the federal government is keeping an eye to the future and our future leaders of tomorrow", or the Canadian Federation of Students who thanked the government for responding to "a longstanding call by students and their families", probably a call that has been out there for 13 long years.

In order to ensure a strong and secure future for Canada, our immigration policies need to be closely aligned with our labour market needs. That is why our government is also making important new innovations in immigration, including changing the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. In doing so, we will improve and speed up the application process.

Summing up, this Conservative government has taken care to strengthen Canada's economic fundamentals. The bill is prudent, focused and responsible in order to ensure Canada is well positioned to weather the uncertainty of today's global economy.

The Liberal Party of Canada's continued support for our Conservative government is a clear indication that we are getting the job done. We are on the right track for all Canadians, and on behalf of the government, I thank our Liberal friends for their consistent support of our initiatives, redefining the official opposition, and we congratulate them for that.

• (1040)

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, during the member's speech he said that time did not permit him to go through all the details of the Budget Implementation Act. He is quite right. There are a broad range of matters that are covered in this bill.



*Government Orders*

In fact, they are so broad that it does beg the question of where are we going with this? What is the vision? There really is no vision here.

As a matter of fact, if we look at the member's statement, one of the things we will find is that it has not laid out an assessment of where we are today, what emerging forces are facing Canada over the coming periods, and what security, prudence and contingency have been provided to ensure the continuity of providing the services and the care and protection for all Canadians on a consistent basis.

That is the purpose of debate here I believe. The purpose is not to see how much time can be filled up by listing a bunch of individual items without showing how they knit together and how they integrate into a vision.

Maybe the member would like to comment on one aspect of a vision and that would be the aspect of perhaps fiscal responsibility. I would say that in the government's own projections it is looking now in the second year of the forecast of being within one SARS event of going into deficit. That is of concern to Canadians.

We do not want to ever go back into deficit. Now, with the high level of petroleum prices, with the U.S. recession, and with the high value of Canadian dollar, all of these factors are putting great pressures on our economy. Many of those have been experienced in certain provinces versus others, such as Ontario in its manufacturing sector. Maybe the member could help advance this debate by telling—

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Ted Menzies:** Mr. Speaker, I would love to advance the debate, especially with such an inviting opening line referring to fiscal responsibility.

It was only weeks ago that our Conservative government started to realize the exact numbers of pre-election promises where the Liberals would spend money. Out of a concern that we wanted to share with Canadians, we added up those numbers. These were hollow promises from the opposition if they ever were, heaven forbid, to form government again.

I can say that that number of promises added up to. It was \$70 billion of uncosted promises. If the Liberals were returned to government, that is what they would hoist on to Canadian taxpayers: uncosted, unsubstantiated, rather scattered promises to get them back into power. As we have heard in the last few days, the only reason for the existence of the Liberals is to get back into power.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, while listening attentively to my colleague's presentation, I got the impression that I was listening to the captain of the *Titanic* mere hours before the boat hit the iceberg. He says that all is well. The budget has been presented as if there are clear skies ahead.

However, this morning, the American Federal Reserve confirmed the current recession in the United States. As well, the International Monetary Fund announced growth of 0.5% over the next three years in the United States. Given that we know how much the entire

Canadian economy depends on the American market, since we export many products to the United States, it is rather surprising that the federal government is not acting.

Hence my question for my colleague about the budget for the year that finished on March 31. How could they have decided to put \$10 billion towards the debt and not in any way have offered tools that could help our businesses become more competitive in the manufacturing and forestry industries? They could have announced refundable tax credits or funding to make our products more attractive to Americans. Now, by lowering the GST, they have only encouraged people to purchase more Chinese products.

I may be playing it up somewhat, but I would like to know if my colleague feels a little like the captain of the *Titanic*. Will he be changing course?

• (1045)

[*English*]

**Mr. Ted Menzies:** Mr. Speaker, I am a prairie boy. I have never had much to do with a ship the size of the *Titanic*. However, I am part of a team that has a firm direction of where it will go. Through the economic fall statement, we proved the government knew where it was headed. We knew there were concerns.

My hon. colleague is correct. The United States is having some difficult economic times. We saw that coming. This is leadership. This is being at the wheel. This is knowing that could very seriously impact Canada. This is why we took the position in the fall to cut taxes, to stimulate industry.

We see the economic fundamentals in the country today because we have strong leadership. We are not only dependent on the U.S. economy. We have diversified our economy. We have supported those struggling industries. A \$1 billion community development trust—

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

**Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance. I was also disappointed with the lack of vision for ordinary working families.

Canfor, in my community of Westminister, British Columbia, shut down last week. Many more across the country have closed. Good paying, family supporting jobs are disappearing, and it is a very serious situation.

He also has said that Canadians want a clean environment, and I agree with him. However, there is nothing in the budget to deal with climate change, another missed opportunity by the Conservative government, carrying on, sadly, in the tradition of the previous Liberal budget.

The budget has \$500 million going into a trust for transit. When the New Democrats had an opportunity in 2005 to amend the Liberal government's budget, they managed to get \$900 million for transit. In this budget it is a paltry amount.

*Government Orders*

When the government found almost \$1 billion for transit in Toronto in the last budget year, why is there so little for transit and infrastructure, which is very much needed to clean our environment, in this budget?

The Evergreen Line is in my community. What was provided for the Evergreen Line, the actual cost of which is \$1.4 billion, was about \$64 million, enough to fund half a kilometre of that line only. This is all that has been provided by the Conservative government for the city of Port Moody and the tricities in British Columbia. Why so little? Why half a kilometre of transit for British Columbia when it has funded, in the last year, almost \$1 billion for the city of Toronto?

**Mr. Ted Menzies:** Mr. Speaker, once again I reiterate that I am proud of the environmental record of the government. We recognize that the environment does not stop at any borders. We support environmental programs from coast to coast to coast, including in British Columbia. It is in partnerships with the provinces that take initiatives of their own to protect the environment where the federal government steps up.

Through a \$33 billion investment in infrastructure across the country, an unprecedented amount of infrastructure investment by the federal government, the largest since the second world war, we are stimulating not only the economy and the jobs that it will provide, but the required replacement and rebuilding of the weak infrastructure we have seen depleted and reduced over years and years of Liberal misconduct. Liberals did not support the infrastructure. They did not recognize that we needed to keep infrastructure up on a day by day and year by year basis. We have put in \$33 billion in partnership with the provinces to keep that infrastructure up.

•(1050)

**Hon. Garth Turner (Halton, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to say a few words on Bill C-50, and I will frame my remarks in three sections.

First, I have a few comments to make on part of my hon. colleague's speech across, which he covered off in one sentence at the end of his presentation. Obviously the government is somewhat embarrassed about how it has tried to bring in crowbar changes to the immigration act.

Second, I asked a number of Canadians if they would like to participate with me in this talk this morning. I have a few comments from people across the country, which I am very happy to read into the record.

Third, I have a few comments as well on the financial implications of the budget and Bill C-50 and where the government and the sad excuse for a finance minister seems to be taking us today.

I stand in the House to speak on behalf of all Canadians on the issue of immigration. Canada is a great nation. We have a reputation around the world for openness and compassion. People want to live here, and I do not blame them. I have a constituency that is literally teeming with new Canadians. They are so welcome in our community all the time.

The Conservative government wants to change the attitude that Canadians have had toward immigration for a long period of time. I do not think the government really wants people to come here, at

least in the quantities they have been. I believe Conservatives want to roll the clock back to a sad time of what I would call Reform Party isolationism. They want to change our immigration policy, not make it more efficient, and that is clear, not fund it properly and reform it to make it less effective.

I think the Conservatives want to limit the number of immigrants who are accepted into our country and slam the door on the rest. Shame on them. It is slamming the door on families that wish to be reunited. It is shutting the door on people seeking a better life for themselves and for their children. It is shutting the door on people who love our country and legitimately want to be part of it. Canada is a beacon that is held up to people around the world.

Canada has a proud history of immigration. Our country was built on it. Perhaps we all saw the report on television last night that more than 5 million Canadians are now visible minorities. That has doubled the number in the last decade or so.

Conservatives now want to wipe out this proud tradition. Not only that, they are trying to force the bill through, placing these measures in a budget bill. That makes it a matter of confidence. It is a bunch of bullies across the way saying that they want us to make their day once again, that they are going to roll everything into a bill and make the opposition members roll the dice. To the Conservatives, it is all or nothing. We cannot debate this or have a proper discussion on it.

That is typical, it is sad and its shameful. These immigration reforms should be removed from Bill C-50, taken out, stripped away, brought into the light of day where we can examine them, as we are supposed to in this place, go through the proper channels so they can get the appropriate amount of due diligence needed to ensure that the interests of all Canadians current and those who look to come here and be Canadians will be met.

We on this side of the House have made it clear. There is nothing in the budget which is even worth defeating. Right now we do not think this is the issue on which Canadians really want to be pushed into an election. There are many, but the budget is not it. It is so tepid, so worthless and so inconsequential that it is not worth it.

However, the immigration issue is something of more substance. It was brought in at the last minute, and that concerns us a lot. Should these reforms remain in the bill, it really is incumbent upon Liberal members of the Standing Committee on Finance to review the measures within the budget implementation bill, hear from Canadians, have hearings, call witnesses and understand it in more detail and explain to Canadians why this is bad legislation.

The Liberal Party has always promoted a progressive immigration policy. We see Canada as a country that welcomes immigrants of all backgrounds and abilities. It is a cornerstone of our party's policy and I believe it represents the feelings of most Canadians. As such, any review of this will have to be looked at in detail and in perspective. We need to ensure that any change to immigration reflects our collective Canadian values and not just those of the governing Conservative Party.

*Government Orders*

•(1055)

One of the reforms would put unprecedented power into the hands of a single minister, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. She would be able to pick and choose immigrants she would deem worthy of being accepted, according to the current beliefs of the Conservative Party. The minister would be given the right to establish categories of applicants and then use these categories or other means to play with the order in which applications would be processed. Does that not strike members as being dangerous? It certainly strikes me and my colleagues that way.

I see my hon. colleague across the way agrees. This is a dangerous precedent. We no longer give people the protection of our laws of Canada. This effectively gives the minister free reign to decide which applications will get processed and even which ones can be returned without even having been processed. Of particular concern to Canadians should be the ability of these reforms to adversely affect categories such as family class and permanent resident status that are made on humanitarian and compassionate grounds.

I said a minute ago, I have a riding that teems with new Canadians. Many constituents in my riding and ridings across the country have families abroad, families that hope one day they will be united with their loved ones. However, the Conservatives do not think reuniting families is good for Canada. They believe these classes do not contribute to our economic growth. If we listen to the pronouncements of the Conservative Party, it is clear it plans to focus resources on the economic class of immigration to the expense of other classes and at the expense of families and those that need our help and our compassion.

This should be of great concern to us in the House and to all Canadians. I, for one, do not trust the Conservatives to use these new powers without a little of their ideological Reform Party ideals.

My colleague says it is the Reform Party isolationism and anti-immigration bias, which we all have seen and we know is there. Fifteen years ago I was a Progressive Conservative. In the 1993 I campaigned hard against exactly the kind of principles that sadly are now instilled in the new Conservative Reform Party.

These will effectively destroy the right of every applicant to be given a fair review and to be considered regardless of background, country, ethnicity, origin, skill-set. The amendments put no limit on these discretionary powers and make them consistent with existing federal-provincial immigration agreements. In fact, it might be a big problem in the province of Quebec, considering its unique jurisdictional authority over immigrant selection.

The Conservatives are saying that these measures with help with the backlog of applications. However, I noted the parliamentary secretary did not even try to justify anything about the inclusion of these changes in the budgetary bill. I think he is probably pretty ashamed at the fact they tried to shoehorn these things in at the last minute, hoping Canadians would not notice. However, they have, they will and they will speak out against them.

The reforms reduce any incentive the government has to do what it should do, which is to increase the immigration department's capacity to process the number of applications it receives each year.

The Conservatives say that they are not trying to decrease the number of immigrants into Canada, but the record tells a different story. They throw around numbers in their press releases, media releases, scrums and in those horrible 10 percenters that they flood the country with, which are completely illegally and break every rule we have in this place, and they should be ashamed that. In those messages they say that they have increased the number of immigrants, but that is not the case.

Last year and the year before the Conservatives issued approximately 251,000 permanent resident visas. Of those issued in 2007, only 236,000 visa holders had arrived by year's end. In comparison, more than 262,000 permanent residents were actively admitted to Canada by the previous Liberal government in 2005.

•(1100)

Canada obviously needs more immigrants, not fewer. We are already facing critical labour shortages that will rise to an alarming rate unless we find new people to help us, people who will put their shoulders to the wheel to build this country. We have an aging population. We have a demographic time bomb in our midst. We need immigrants. We need people who want to be in Canada to build this place.

I said a moment ago that I think my hon. colleague opposite and his fellow Conservatives want this to go through without people noticing. It is not going to happen. I would like to read into the record a couple of comments from some of the people from across the country who overnight last night asked me to read some of their comments into the record. I said I would.

David Bakody from Nova Scotia said:

This is the prime example of "Do as we say not as we do". It was just a week ago or so [the Minister of Finance] stood [and] stated to the media that the RESP [the passage of it by Parliament] was an American style tactic. (untrue) It was as have many before and will be "A Budget Amendment" fully open to debate. This Immigration Bill is a long time Reform idea hatched by [the Reform Party] and now about to be forced down the throats of Canadians that is truly a classic case of... Republican Style in your face plans to remove all rights that democracy has achieved in lives of brave soldiers and peoples in two world wars... Even all those ungrateful Reformers now hidden in Conservative uniforms who sit and plot behind closed doors. Shame—

I asked him to make his remarks addressed to you, Mr. Speaker. He has great respect for your position. David from Nova Scotia said:

Shame Mr. Speaker, please ask each and every MP to look to the right, look to the left, look across the aisle and ask yourself what did mine and your family bring to Canada a couple of hundred or so years ago? Most will say hope? Hope for a better future for our children, and now that hope is about to be removed.

I asked another commenter, a fellow from Toronto, what I should say when I stand to speak to the bill in the House of Commons. He suggested:

I would [use] this quote from an April 2, 2008...article with respect to its latest polls that demonstrates a waning momentum for the Conservatives and by contrast, a building for the Liberals, as more and more citizens are awakening to the deceptive methodology that seems [to] underlie every single movement taken by this [Conservative] government, with questionable "ends-justifies-the-means" ethics employed right back to the birth of that party.

He said:

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I would draw a parallel to the unprecedented powers that Republicans gave their President to overrule Congress and [the] long history of habeas corpus in the accumulated foundation of the Common Law, and how this new Conservative law too would short-circuit existing checks and balances [that we have in our government]. Then identify where such subversion of the checks and balances has been a general theme of this government through such things as dismantling of [the] Court Challenges Program, this being a further progression of that theme.

He recommended that I should conclude this speech by saying:

...that when the momentum has built for the Liberals to return to leading government, contrary to the Conservative government where words and action with respect to accountability and ethics do not jive—word will be [the] bond—they will rescind the subversive travesty against honest and proper procedure. Along with the rescinding of tactics will be a rescinding of the unprecedented ministerial power that is so open to abuse.

K. Murphy of Alberta said:

I recall a comment made by Stephen Harper sometime prior to the 2006—

• (1105)

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order. The hon. member should know that he cannot do indirectly what he is not supposed to do directly. I am sure he could have substituted some other word.

**Hon. Garth Turner:** Absolutely, Mr. Speaker, excuse me.

In this particular correspondence the writer recalls a comment made by the prime minister to be in the 2006 federal election.

To paraphrase, One will not recognize Canada by the time I am finished with it. I have not recognized it for some time now.

This person said:

Counting Tuesday's vote on...the private member's bill [regarding lowering the] Peace Tower flag, [which we passed], and the government's decision to NOT honour a vote in the [House of Commons]; to cherry-pick who can and cannot come into this country based on a criterion that is not open to discussion [by Parliament or all of us] smacks of a policy that should truly frighten all of us.

The citizens understand. The citizens get it. The taxpayers of Canada are watching and listening.

The parliamentary secretary can brush over this change in one sentence of his speech introducing this legislation to this House. He thinks people do not understand. He thinks Canadians are not paying attention. He thinks we are all stupid and asleep at the switch. We are not. Canadians understand clearly when something goes through this House and is not presented to the representatives of the people for proper scrutiny and debate. People see that. They remember it, and they will take action on it.

I have a message here from Judy Birch of Clifford, Ontario. She wrote her member of Parliament, who actually is a Conservative member of Parliament. I believe his riding is Wellington—Halton Hills. She said:

Sir, Please explain to me why you are including a drastic change in immigration policy to a budget bill?

Whose decision was this? How much input did you have in this new policy?

Were you consulted about the ramifications of two-tier immigration policies?

Were you consulted about the effects of non reunification of families?

She asked her member, the Conservative member for Wellington—Halton Hills:

Were you given a comprehensive outline of the criteria that would be used in the selection of so-called "superior" applicants?

I do not understand the need to hide our immigration rules in a budget bill.

Excellent questions, indeed.

Martin Mulligan from Newfoundland wrote to me overnight:

While I do not necessarily want to give you words for your speech, I do want to let you know that I oppose the inclusion of the immigration matter in the budget implementation bill. ...I would prefer to see C-50 amended and split into two bills: the budget implementation bill and an immigration bill. This should be done as a matter of principle if for no other reason. Once you permit an unrelated bill to pass as part of a money bill, the cat will be out of the bag and this will become a recurring practice. A practice that is abhorrent to good parliamentary democracy.

The people understand this. They see what is going on. They understand that this government cannot attach things to a bill just to get them through, then roll the dice and make it a confidence issue, stand over there like a bunch of bullies and say, "All right, bring it on. Bring us down. Let us see what you are made of."

Those is the kind of schoolyard tactics I do not think Canadians appreciate, and I do not think they want. They expect us to come to this place and stand up for the values in our community, in our country and in the towns and cities that we represent. This is what Canadians sent us here for, to debate these issues. If we are going to change the face of immigration in this country, if we are going to make it harder and more difficult for classes of people to come here, we have to give them a reason. That is what Canada stands for.

Why do people want to come to this country? Because we have a representative democracy where the voice of the people matters, at least in principle, at least on paper. Until we get to this place and we see laws brought in, changes brought in which will fundamentally change the nature of our country and call into question the compassion that we all feel for values and for the people who come and without even be able to debate it.

The government is wrong. It was wrong to do this. It was wrong to add on a measure to kill the RESP tax deductibility provision that this Parliament passed. That was wrong. That was wrong. It was wrong for it to add on budget bill provisions that will change the face of immigration in this country.

• (1110)

This is not what we are here for. You know that. My colleagues across the way, you know that. You know that is not why you were sent here.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I remind the hon. member that he was lapsing into the second person again. We try not to do that, don't we?

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Peterborough.

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in 2005 I was nominated a candidate for the Conservative Party. I did not have the opportunity to sit in this House when the decision was made by this party that a Liberal government that had stolen from its people, as evidenced by the Gomery inquiry, was not fit to govern. From that point on our Conservative members made the decision that they would take every possible opportunity to bring that government down, because they did not believe that it was fit to govern. They did not care what the polls of the day said; they believed that the people would support them.

The member stands in the House today and makes the argument that this is a democracy. Bills are decided on in this House by people who will stand in their place and be counted, who will vote.

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I say to the member who spent the other day at finance committee, by the way, autographing copies of his autobiography, *Greater Fool*, rather than paying attention to what was going on in committee, if he believes in anything that he said, will he stand in his place and be counted? Even more than that, will the members of his party stand in their places and be counted, or will they simply go on and on, with more hot air, more wind and more apparent disagreement with the government, without actually standing and being counted?

I ask the Halton hawk, will he stand and be counted?

**Hon. Garth Turner:** Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite could defend the points that I made in my speech, he would have done so.

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member's speech very carefully. I agree with a number of the concerns that he raised, particularly with respect to the impact of Bill C-50 on matters related to immigration.

I and my caucus had hoped that those matters would be brought before this House in a separate bill so that we could debate them fully, that we could have deputations on that matter, and that we could deal with it and hopefully dispose of that bill in a separate manner.

As the member rightfully points out, the bill gives the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration the power to impose quotas, dispose and discard immigration applications and facilitate queue jumping. I think there are thousands of people who are watching the proceedings today who would be disgusted that that item has found its way into the budget bill.

Similarly, that part of the bill limits the ability of ordinary Canadians to be united based on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. Those cases come into my community office all the time. The same is true for visa applications.

I have to say that when the member then says that what really matters is that we are here to give voice to the concerns of newcomers to this country so that their voices are heard in this chamber, I would suggest to him that it is even more important not that just their voices be heard, but that they be actually fully represented. The best opportunity for that representation is during votes in this House.

I and my colleagues will be voting against Bill C-50, in large part because of the immigration measures that are part of Bill C-50. I would like to ask the member whether he too will be standing in his place to oppose Bill C-50, to stand up for newcomers to Canada, to stand up for those who are hoping to come to Canada, or will he simply give voice and thereby play immigrants for fools?

**Hon. Garth Turner:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member will get an opportunity to see what our strategy is when it in fact happens.

We have our eyes on what we believe is the ultimate goal that Canadians want, and that is the replacement of the Conservatives as the governing party of this country. That is what we are most focused on. We will take every strategic action we feel necessary to achieve that, and she will be very happy with the results.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member for Halton for his hard work and his passion in serving his constituents and all Canadians. He was

also in my riding talking to seniors about income trusts, so I thank him.

My question is about these sweeping changes to immigration that are in the budget bill. I would like to thank the member for bringing out that the government is misleading Canadians, and that it has brought in 36,000 fewer immigrants to this country during its tenure and the backlog has grown by 100,000 people. That is the truth and it is good that he brought that truth forward.

I would ask the hon. member about hiding these changes in the budget bill. Does the hon. member for Halton agree that these reforms remove equality from Canada's immigration system and does it give the minister the ability to close the doors to those she does not want?

● (1115)

**Hon. Garth Turner:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague has hit the nail on the head. This is exactly what I find most dangerous about this proposed change. I think my party and my colleagues feel very passionate about it as well.

Everyone goes into politics, presumably, for honourable reasons and they do try to do responsible things. However, we find it dangerous when there is no system of checks and balances that are put around ministerial control.

Our system of government has far fewer checks and balances built into it than does, say, the American system. We have ministers and a Prime Minister who are extremely powerful in this country. Therefore, when we give sweeping powers to a minister, particularly the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration who would have power over virtually the life and future happiness of thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of people from around the world who want to join us in this great country, a land of opportunity, we find that to be an extremely dangerous situation.

It is certainly, at the minimum, worthy of debate and examination and the bright light of day being put on these changes. At the minimum, the bill needs to be split into two so that we can debate it, hear witnesses, call hearings and determine the proper course of action.

The government's actions right now are reprehensible, shameful and they are being watched.

**Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am not sure why the member added the last three points. They really do not have anything to do with the issue we are dealing with today.

I have a couple of things on which I want to ask for the member's comments and ask him to interpret a couple of things that will show the error of the Liberal Party's ways.

First, when \$22 million is to be spent on working through an 800,000 persons problem, created by the previous government, over the next two years, leading to \$37 million the year following, it is entirely appropriate for that decision to be made within the framework and the context of a budget.

What is as fundamentally important is the fact that we have an immigration policy that is being supported by Canadians across this country. The *Winnipeg Free Press* editorial states:

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For the Liberals to exploit this, however, not only ignores the national need for the party's own political advantage, but also ignores the ugly truth that it was the Liberals who created this problem. In the years 1993-2006, the immigration backlog grew from 50,000 to 800,000.

Those are people who want to move and live in this country and become Canadian citizens.

The article goes on to state:

Canadians, new and old, have been offered a clear choice: Conservative policy that will benefit Canada, or politics that will benefit Liberals.

Is it the right thing or is it the wrong thing to tell immigrants who want to become Canadian citizens to have their names and their files put on a list and simply wait?

**Hon. Garth Turner:** Mr. Speaker, first, I believe the amount of money the hon. member referenced, the \$22 million, is less than 1% of the current budget of the immigration department. Therefore, to link that with getting a waiting list of 800,000 people down into management territory is simply fallacious. It is not enough money to do that, sadly. It is more a public relations exercise than anything else.

Second, the hon. member is a very partisan guy but do I agree with some of what he said. One of those statements is that what is wrong with this place is that we are black on one side and white on the other and every Canadian knows it is grey. It is sad when we need to play such partisan politics with an issue that will determine the life, the hope and the future of tens or hundreds of thousands of people.

I just wish we could take these changes, put them into a bill, sit around and discuss it and determine what is best for all of those people instead of trying to ram it through. That is all. I do not think that is a hugely partisan point. I think it is one that the House reasonably should accept.

• (1120)

[Translation]

**Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, today we are debating Bill C-50, the budget implementation act. Naturally, the Bloc Québécois will vote against this bill because it voted against the budget. Since then, the government has given us no reason to believe that it is even aware of the significant economic downturn or that it should be using the tools that would enable our economy to cope with these new realities.

Last fall, the Bloc Québécois held consultations throughout Quebec. A number of important facts emerged, and at the time, we told the Conservative government that it should change its stance on economic intervention. The Conservative government makes its decisions based on the premise that the market will sort everything out and decide how things should work. If plants close and economic disaster hits communities, the communities and the companies will just have to cope and regroup. According to that philosophy, we, the state, do not have a role to play.

This approach was inherited from the American right, which has been trying to impose its point of view for the past 25, 30 or 40 years. The American right has been pretty successful in the United States, and is trying to achieve success in Canada through a minority

government, but Quebecers and Canadians will not fall for it. Right now, if there is one thing they do not want, it is a majority Conservative government, because we have seen just what it can do as a minority government. Imagine what it might do if it had a majority. That much is clear.

The analogy I used earlier with respect to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance is apt. The Conservative government is behaving just like the captain of the *Titanic*. Worse yet, the Minister of Finance wants to go sailing in waters where he was not elected. Let me go back to the *Titanic* analogy. The *Titanic* was supposed to be an extraordinary ship, just like Canada's economy. It was supposed to be able to sail through any storm. Unfortunately, its builders were a bit too arrogant, a bit too proud, and we know what happens to people like that.

I am afraid that if the Government of Canada does not make some adjustments, Canada will suffer the same fate as the *Titanic*. This morning, the U.S. federal reserve confirmed that the United States is in a recession. The International Monetary Fund has forecast growth of approximately 0.5% in the United States over the next three years. This is very bad news for the Canadian economy and especially for the economies of Quebec and Ontario. When the Americans have less purchasing power, as they do currently, consumer spending goes down. Companies in my riding are having difficulty selling their products in the United States, and this is true throughout Quebec and across Canada.

The Conservative government has taken the stand that it cannot intervene. That is the rule of market forces, which is a little like the divine rule. But we know that there have been other serious economic crises in the past. We know—and people are starting to say—that during the great depression in the 1930s, when the Republicans in the U.S. were saying that the government should not intervene, it took the Democrats under Mr. Roosevelt to do something and make a difference.

What we are saying is that when the economy slows down, the government must invest to boost the economy. The Conservative government does not want to take that route. It is stubbornly insisting on keeping its rose-coloured glasses on, even though since last fall, and even since last year, there have been very clear signs—such as the increase in the value of the dollar and the bank paper crisis in the United States and its impact on consumers—that the government needs to be much more aggressive.

Here is the worst example of the Conservatives' inaction: they used the \$10 billion surplus as of March 31 to pay down the debt, even though Canada has the best debt to GDP ratio. Canada is already in good shape on this front. The government did not use this money to help the manufacturing, forestry and tourism industries acquire the tools they need to offer competitive products.

I am not talking about subsidies. Businesspeople in my riding are in serious trouble, but they are not asking for subsidies. Workers are not asking for subsidies for the companies where they work. They are asking the government to put in place a fiscal framework so that these companies can be productive and competitive.

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For example, let us talk about the money from the latest cut to the GST. Instead of lowering the tax, the government could have kept that margin to award refundable tax credits to businesses that are not generating much profit, as is unfortunately the case for businesses in the manufacturing and forestry industries in various regions throughout Quebec. The same thing is going on in Ontario and the rest of Canada.

• (1125)

The government should have implemented a suitable support and assistance program for businesses. It should have reinvested in the Technology Partnerships Canada program, which made it possible to develop new products with the help of new technologies. This is the type of attitude the government needed to move forward. But we have not seen it in the budget or in this bill. The government still seems to be headed in the same direction.

The government thinks it is improving the overall economy by systematically cutting taxes for large corporations, which means that oil companies pay lower taxes. But now there is a domino effect: the bank credit crisis has spilled over into the consumer sector, and the last sector affected will be natural resources.

The parts of Canada that think they are immune to this slowdown are mistaken, because American consumption will decrease in all sectors, and there will be consequences. This is not a preordained situation where we cannot do anything. The government can get involved, but it is not. That is why we would have expected the government to take constructive measures and implement an action plan for our communities, for our citizens and for the workers in our regions.

But the opposite is happening. For example, in terms of regional development, this bill would decrease the budget of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec—talk about unbelievable—by \$107 million for the current fiscal year, a year when we will more likely need even more money to help businesses.

The minister now feels obliged to justify his actions. He says the government no longer really has the means to fund businesses that were receiving financial support to back the overall economy of a region and that their funding should be withdrawn in order to be able to allocate enough assistance to businesses. What we needed, however, was both. We have the means to help businesses and to develop new products. Any business that has the tools to do research and development will use that to create new products, thereby becoming more competitive and selling products elsewhere. It is not about accepting subsidies to offset lost productivity. It is about ensuring the competitiveness of those businesses.

Furthermore, we would have expected this government to eagerly seize such an opportunity for sustainable development. In the current economic climate, the most important tool would be to make the most of the opportunities provided by the creation of new products for sustainable development.

Consider the carbon exchange, for example. In my riding, a company had developed a product and was waiting for the carbon exchange to be implemented, since revenues from the sale of credits on the carbon exchange would have been assured its profitability.

However, because of the government's delay and its decision to not establish absolute targets, the carbon exchange is not yet up and running and this is delaying the development of these products, which would be beneficial not only for the environment, but also for economic development, new product development and, therefore, sustainable development.

One could say that the government has neglected its responsibility to create prosperity, as though creating prosperity were the responsibility of the private sector alone. Its method for distributing prosperity is even borrowed from that of the private sector. Indeed, they are trying their best to avoid distributing wealth. Thus, the government is still following the American right-wing model. A perfect example of this is the creation of an employment insurance board.

The Bloc Québécois and I, as the human resources critic, have been waging a battle over this issue for several years. I have seen the contribution made by seasonal workers go towards deficit reduction without them ever obtaining a return on their investment.

This year, the Conservatives decided to follow through on the idea of establishing an independent employment insurance board and that is a good thing. However, it is unacceptable that, having paid \$54 billion towards the deficit, the workers and employers will not get any return on their investment.

The screws have been tightened. Workers need more hours of employment to qualify for employment insurance and, in the end, they receive fewer weeks of benefits. This system was in place for 10 years. Once the government's economic and financial situation stabilized, all the efforts made were forgotten. It was as though it had never existed.

However, major corporations have had their taxes cut. That is also the case for the middle class, but it is fair that there should be a return on investment on that side.

• (1130)

What is unfair is that those who pay into the employment insurance program and need this program do not have access to it. In our regions, not all workers have employment year round; some are seasonal workers.

Over the years, a special system has been set up for seasonal workers through pilot projects, but without amending the legislation. There has been some improvement. We would have liked the government to show some common sense and give this new independent fund a portion of the surplus it used to finance the deficit reduction and current government operations. However, that is not the case.

With regard to the manufacturing and forestry sectors, the message was sent to the House this week. A motion by a Bloc member, the whip, in fact, was adopted by this House. According to this motion, the government should have a forestry strategy. It does not have one and the consequences have been devastating.

*Government Orders*

In my riding, there are some companies that are very solid financially and very solid insofar as the quality of their forestry management is concerned. Nowadays, though, the heads of these companies are coming to see us and saying that they have reached the end of their rope and will have to shut down for three months. In one of the companies, an approach has been developed for which employees should be congratulated: wages are tied to the price of wood. This helps save jobs. Employees have been paid less for a while, but they hope to weather the crisis in fairly good shape.

These employees and employers would have liked to see a program to help older workers. When someone has put everything he has into finding a job or loses his job in a sawmill at 56 years of age, he cannot become a computer technician overnight, even though he has been one of the best at grading lumber for 30 years.

We try to find him another job, but it is not easy. From the standpoint of employers, hiring an older worker means that their health benefit and occupational safety costs might increase. In their eyes, an older worker is riskier and they are reluctant to hire him. So when the older worker's employment insurance runs out, he is left with nothing. He worked full time for a company for 25 or 30 years and never drew employment insurance, but once his 45 weeks are up, the next stop is social assistance.

This is a social measure but it could also be seen as an economic plan in connection with a very necessary industrial strategy. It is always good to have a program that gives people some income support until they qualify for their old age pensions. At the same time, this plan would make it possible to keep younger workers in the forestry sector. Forestry will not be in decline for the rest of time. There will be an economic recovery and an upswing in construction. We are going to need workers, but the youngest will have been lost because they are most affected by layoffs. They will find work elsewhere, and when the recovery comes, they will no longer be available.

We would have expected the government to drop the kind of approach it took in the budget and adjust instead to what people were telling it. It is the first time in my 15 years as a member that I have seen such a thing. During the week following the tabling of the budget, the Standing Committee on Finance agreed, with the support of some Conservative members, to reconsider the entire section on manufacturing and forestry. It adopted a motion telling the Minister of Finance to get back to work because the government had not done enough for this sector. But the government is still refusing to bend.

The Minister of Finance is hiding behind general tax reductions for the people who make lots of money; but he has used just one part of the strategy that is available to him. It is as though he had a pair of crutches and only used one. He had the means to implement a much broader initiative. It is good to reduce taxes by a few points, but we must also have targeted approaches to support research and development, to provide assistance through tax credits that lead to the development of new products, and to provide help to older workers. There is none of that in this budget and there is nothing in the program now before us. It is no longer a matter of productivity, but a matter of fairness.

In Quebec and in Canada, for about 15 years, the guaranteed income supplement has been paid to a few of the older people who

were entitled to receive it. A person had to apply in order to receive it. There was no automatic enrolment, and each year it was necessary to apply again. This scandal came to light about seven or eight years ago. At the time, a Bloc member, Marcel Gagnon, worked very hard to find those people, to enable them to apply for the guaranteed income supplement. We found thousands of them. We also recognized that there was a terrible unfairness in the law.

•(1135)

Let us look at the example of a 78-year-old woman whose husband has died. Her children review her financial situation with her. They suddenly realize that she has not been receiving the guaranteed income supplement. They submit an application and learn that she can only claim up to 11 months in arrears. Even though this woman was entitled to receive it from the age of 65, she cannot claim any more than 11 months.

Compare that with the behaviour of the government when someone owes income tax. In that case, it can go back as far as it wants. It can claim as many years as it wants. However, the older person cannot claim more than 11 months in arrears. No member in this House can contradict that. Older people have been entitled to amounts going back two, three, five or seven years, and the government had the means of paying such claims with no difficulty. In any case, about 95% of that money is quickly returned to the economy. People do not get rich on old age security or the guaranteed income supplement. They only provide a minimum to make ends meet every month.

I am particularly sensitive to this because in my region, in eastern Quebec, 52% of seniors living in the regional county municipality with the highest income are receiving the guaranteed income supplement. That means that for every two seniors you meet, at least one of them is receiving the supplement. In the poorest regional county municipality, we are talking about 79%, three people out of four, and in many of the villages the rate is 100%, four people out of four. For a long time, our seniors worked for employers that did not provide pension plans. Today, in a society that calls itself one of the richest in the world, we are unable to provide these people with a minimum income that would let them live out their days with dignity.

This is blatantly unfair. When we measure the effectiveness of a society like ours, we have to take these things into account. Creating wealth is all very well, but we have to see how we are creating it and how we are distributing it. These two main points are how a government can be measured when it comes to finances.

In the present situation, our government is withdrawing from the entire field of economic development, and saying that the private sector should look after that; it will not create the conditions that must be present in order to continue developing products; it will eliminate programs like Technology Partnerships Canada because there may have been a few excesses when it came to a few companies, minimal as that was; the regions are now going to have to fend for themselves. And for next year, it will be eliminating \$107 million in investments in Quebec. This is the kind of thing the Conservatives are doing when it comes to creating wealth in Canada; they have decided they are not responsible for it anymore.



*Government Orders*

And then, when it comes to distributing the wealth, they always give as little as possible, and they do not recognize the contribution that people make to our society.

There is one thing in the budget that I consider to be terrible. That is the provision for a senior to be able to receive \$3,500 in non-taxable income. Do you know what that means? It means we are encouraging people who are 68 or 70 or 72 years old to go knock on the door at Dunkin' Donuts or Wal-Mart or some other employer, to earn a few pennies. Do you not think that our seniors deserve a better fate than that, and that in our society we might have the resources to provide them with what they deserve?

It has been calculated that we would need to add about \$100 a month to the guaranteed income supplement to give people an income that comes up to the minimum threshold for them to be able to get along, to meet their basic needs. They could have addressed part of that out of last year's budget surplus, and included it in the budget for this year. It could have been done. They did not do it.

So we can see that there are many reasons to vote against this budget and the budget implementation bill. The Conservative budget is fundamentally at odds with the needs expressed by Quebecers during prebudget consultations. We submitted these needs to the minister, and we are waiting for his cooperation.

If there had not been problems with the official opposition, we would be in an election now and the Conservative government would be severely judged for the choices it has made. I hope that the result could be more in line with what citizens want, especially those in Quebec. This government gives the impression that it is open to the province; but in practice, when it comes time to take concrete action, it pulls back and does nothing. We saw it again yesterday with the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec.

I hope that the government is taking note of this message, because if there is no change within a few months in terms of economic policy, the public will pass an even more severe judgment about the fiscal issue.

• (1140)

[English]

**Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest and there are so many points to address, but I will only do a couple.

While my hon. colleague over there can wallow in delusions of relevancy, however, he fails to make the connection between wealth creation and social programs as does the class warfare party across the chamber from him.

I will give him a couple of points to chew on. He slags helping business to make profits. I point out that 16% of manufacturing jobs in the province of Ontario are directly linked to the oil patch in Alberta. I am not sure what the number is for Quebec but it is a significant number as well. Forty per cent of the contracts in the oil patch come to the province of Ontario, and another significant percentage to the province of Quebec.

How many jobs does that create? How much income tax does that generate? How much money to fund social programs does that

generate in the provinces of Quebec, Ontario, and the rest of Canada? It is very significant.

When Quebec pension funds are invested or teachers' pension funds are invested or union pension funds are invested, where are they invested? I think the member should check to see where they are. I think he will find that a very significant portion of those pension funds are invested in things like the oil patch in Alberta.

Therefore, when the member slags those kinds of things, I think he is really slugging his own province and he should probably wake up and smell the coffee in Canada, and see who is really supporting it. It is not just Alberta. It is all of Canada. It is all benefiting Quebec as it is benefiting the rest of Canada.

[Translation]

**Mr. Paul Crête:** Mr. Speaker, I am well aware that the economy is doing well out west. I would have wanted the government, though, to create conditions that would help our manufacturers develop products that enable them to win a lot more contracts in western Canada.

All that the government has decided so far is to give major tax breaks to companies that are making a lot of profit, while the people struggling to develop products in our small and medium-sized companies do not have refundable tax credits. The Conservatives will not go there.

The government could also have done more in western Canada by adopting a sustainable development policy. Surely they got the message from the American government. The oil companies are going to have to adapt now because of the American energy act. Oil from the tar sands no longer meets the American standards. The companies did not make adjustments for environmental reasons, but maybe the government will do so for economic reasons.

The approach taken, not just by the Conservatives but by the Liberals too, is ultimately unsustainable. We are on the verge of an international environmental catastrophe. If we fail to take significant action and implement Kyoto plus, our children and people who are now 10, 15 or 20 years old will suffer a catastrophe. Even the oil companies realize this. They are investing in other sectors now, such as renewable energies, and doing it as much as possible.

No one in Canada believes more in free trade than Quebecers. Without them, there never would have been a free trade agreement with the Americans. The Quebec sovereignists, including Jacques Parizeau, wanted free trade, as did Mr. Bourassa who was the federalist premier at the time. We all wanted free trade. We are ready to compete with the world. We have no problem with that. However, governments have to make appropriate choices.

The day after the federal budget was tabled, the Quebec finance minister said it was bad for Quebec. That was not a separatist speaking but a Liberal minister of the Quebec government. She said it did not do enough for the manufacturing and forestry sectors.

*Government Orders*

What was most insulting was when they wanted to create a billion-dollar trust fund to diversify the regional economy and the Prime Minister made it dependent on the passage of the budget. The House forced him to back down. That is why we keep fighting in the hope that the Conservative government will open its eyes some day, shake off its ideological blinkers, and take a pragmatic path that will really help create prosperity.

• (1145)

[*English*]

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments by the member opposite about the manufacturing sector and particularly his analysis of how inadequate the government's "targeted action" for manufacturing really was.

I come from Hamilton and I certainly appreciate that we have lost not only plants through plant closures but we have lost thousands of jobs because of restructuring and reorganization. I certainly had hoped as he did that there would be some significant help for the manufacturing sector.

I wonder if the member could comment whether he agrees that when we talk about the manufacturing sector what we are really talking about is workers. This budget did precious little to support workers who have been affected by the hemorrhaging of manufacturing jobs, up to the tune of 300 a day now across this country.

One of the things that I think in this budget is worth noting in that regard is the really profound changes to the employment insurance system in this country. I look at this budget and what I see is a legalized theft of about \$57 billion. We had that surplus in the EI system. What the government is proposing to do instead is to create a reserve fund of a mere \$2 billion. What happened to the rest of that money?

The member talked about forestry as well as manufacturing and right across this country people are losing jobs. At the very time when they need the EI system, it is not there for them. The changes in this budget do absolutely nothing to ensure that Canadians have access to benefits or that the quality of those benefits will actually improve for them as they need them.

In fact, it would be my contention that what the government is doing is a complete evasion of its responsibilities to workers in our country.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Paul Crête:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question. I would point out that the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology adopted a unanimous report on the manufacturing sector about a year and a half ago. My colleague from Windsor and I were members of the committee at the time.

During our tour, it was in Windsor, Ontario, that the most terrifying fact came to light: what was happening in Windsor was a sign of things to come over the next year and a half to two years for the rest of Quebec and Ontario. We have not yet overcome this crisis; we are still in the thick of it. This situation is a difficult one, and even the Conservative members of the committee at the time agreed, because the report was unanimous.

Afterward, the Standing Committee on Finance supported the fiscal measures in the report, and that created expectations among workers. My colleague is right. Jobs are one thing, but we need to understand what this situation means for workers: jobs lost, families falling apart, and lack of respect for older workers who have spent years of their lives supporting their families and their communities. Now, these workers are being treated like broken parts. That kind of attitude is totally unacceptable. We were hoping the government would take that message to heart and adjust its attitude accordingly.

That is why the Bloc Québécois is not afraid of voting against this bill and against the budget. The measures they are proposing are not satisfactory and will hinder the development of our communities and the well-being of the workers and families in those communities.

We had the means to do more, to do better—we still do. That is the message we want to send to the government by voting against this bill.

[*English*]

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that the government members think that this debate is all about how many throwaway lines can be given to dismiss the concerns raised by hon. members in this place.

The budget that we had was a mishmash of gimmicky items. They were not interconnected in any way whatsoever. I very much doubt if the government could come up with some sort of a theme that would identify the vision that the budget has for Canada and that addresses our country's needs. It does not address climate change, infrastructure, and the needs of the poor working families.

One of the things I have noticed is that the other members in this place from the opposition parties have identified the risks that we are facing and the challenges that are emerging, and the impact this budget will have on families, on jobs and on industry sectors which provide the good paying jobs for those families.

We have experienced in Ontario and Quebec significant losses in the manufacturing and forestry sectors. We are going to need programs for training, retraining and investment. We have to make sure that these people who cannot look forward to get back into their same job are given an opportunity to quickly get back into—

• (1150)

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order. The hon. member ought to take that as a comment because time for a question ran out.

The hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Paul Crête:** Mr. Speaker, many colleagues will perhaps be unhappy, but these arguments from members show exactly what should be done.

I am nevertheless very disappointed. In order to get the government to take action, the official opposition would have had to follow us or show leadership on some issues and vote against the government on the budget, so that the people of Quebec and Canada can decide whether they want this type of action or another type of government action.

*Government Orders*

The message currently being sent to Canadians is that we have a government that does not do what we want, and an official opposition that puts up with it and keeps the government alive. It is clear in Quebec that this has led to policies that do not correspond to what Quebec wants. I think that the Canadian system will never let Quebec truly have enough control over its own development. Quebec will have to be sovereign in order to have the necessary opportunities to develop. As long as we are part of Canada, it is very important—

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member for Outremont.

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will begin by asking for the consent of this House to share my time with the member for Trinity—Spadina.

[English]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The House has heard the request of the hon. member to split his time with the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina. Is there unanimous consent?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

[Translation]

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair:** Mr. Speaker, some of our colleagues have said they would indeed like to hear from her, and rightfully so, because the budget implementation bill before us today contains very important provisions that would drastically change Canada's immigration system. And my colleague, the opposition critic for immigration, will have some very important things to say on this.

Let us look at the budget situation. The budget is a rather complex document that includes all kinds of explanations, tables and graphs, and the same is true of the budget implementation bill. But if people really want to understand at a glance, through just one example, exactly where the Conservatives are going with this budget, I invite them to look at table 5.4 in the budget, and this can be consulted online.

We are currently at the beginning of April, which corresponds to the beginning of what we here in the House call a fiscal year or financial year. The government's budget ends on March 31, so we just began a new year, in budget terms.

For the current fiscal year, 2008-09, as well as for 2009-10, that is, over a two year period, the Conservatives plan to reduce corporate contributions by 14%. In other words, corporate taxes will drop by 14%. That same table shows that, at the same time, during the same two year period, the Conservatives plan to increase personal taxes by 12%. Thus, there will be a 14% reduction for businesses and a 12% increase for each of my colleagues, myself and everyone at home listening to this debate.

This is part of the budget package that the public has the right to know about and understand. As my colleague just said, this is an ideological choice the Conservatives made. But what makes me sad is to see the so-called official opposition stand up to ask questions and make comments, creating the illusion for Quebecers and Canadians that they are against the budget, when in fact they are not. They are supporting the budget because they are voting for it. They are supporting the Conservatives' budget choices.

That is what happens when you have no convictions and you do not believe in anything. The public can really see the Liberals for who they are, based on one of the things they said recently. They said that their own well-being as a political party was the only reason for their behaviour. They are not thinking about the economy, the segments of society that need help, the fate of social programs or the crisis in Canada's manufacturing and forestry industries. The only thing that matters to the Liberal Party of Canada is the Liberal Party of Canada.

We in the NDP at least have a vision we uphold. We are not afraid of facing voters in an election. We are convinced that by meeting people and explaining the choices we are making and the actions we are taking to create a more just society and eliminate inequalities, we will win more public support for the New Democratic Party. That is what is happening in Quebec, as people realize the benefits of our platform and what we stand for.

Although I do not agree with the Conservative government and I do not approve of its budget choices or its vision of society, at least the Conservative position exists and is clear. I can quote the Conservatives' proposal to reduce corporate taxes by 14% and increase personal income tax by 12%. The public can make up their own minds.

However, it cannot be said that the Liberal Party of Canada has a clear position, because the sad fact is that it does not believe in anything.

● (1155)

I was listening to a question earlier. It was interesting to note the Conservatives' attitude. As you know, Canada is a very big country and, since World War II, the second largest in terms of land mass. Many generations worked very hard to build a balanced economy and they succeeded. We had a primary sector based primarily on natural resources—mining and forestry. And we had a processing sector—the plants and factories—for the most part concentrated in Ontario and Quebec, but also found across Canada, as they should be in a modern economy and within such a vast country as ours.

Naturally, in the past generation, the financial services sector has emerged. These services represent an increasingly important component of our economy. That makes for a balanced economy. We had a little bit of everything, including one of the highest levels of prosperity in the world.

*Government Orders*

The Conservatives are now in their third year in power. And what is happening under this Conservative government? Despite claiming to be a good manager, it is making some serious mistakes in managing our economy, a little like our neighbours to the south. It is interesting because they are both right-wing governments and they both claim to be competent administrators and to understand the realities. Earlier, we heard the insults. It is interesting that the Americans are in a recession—as their own government has admitted—and very soon we may be headed in that direction. Has the government made plans? Not at all. Does the budget do anything but exacerbate the problems? Unfortunately, it does not.

The Minister of Finance is talking about last fall's tax cuts as proof that he is doing something for business. However, a forestry or manufacturing company that did not make any profits certainly can not benefit from tax cuts: no profits, no tax. Where did that \$14 billion go? It went to sectors that are overheating right now, including the oil sector in western Canada.

This is pushing our loonie to unprecedented heights. A high Canadian dollar makes it increasingly difficult to export what we manufacture here in Canada. A vicious circle is starting to take hold. Rather than act like prudent administrators and consider the possible outcome, they are doing the opposite. They are taking money from individuals and giving it to the richest companies. The NDP does not accept that. Our vision is entirely different.

I will share the rest of my time with the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina. Earlier, and yesterday and the day before yesterday during question period, I heard the Liberals lamenting the misdeed the Conservatives are about to commit in immigration, in other words, throw out a fair system where the rules are clear for everyone and replace it with a purely random and discriminatory system that focuses strictly on the arbitrary. It is true that the Liberals' chronic mismanagement has put 900,000 people on the waiting list. It is a tragedy resulting from scandalously bad management, but that is the Liberal trademark. However, it is no excuse for the Conservatives to replace the existing system with a system based on ideological choices that can result in the exclusion of some people because of their country of origin.

I will now leave the rest of my time to my colleague from Trinity—Spadina.

• (1200)

[English]

**Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the member's comments. If I may quote him, to begin with he said that “the Liberal Party believes in nothing”. That is what the member for Outremont said. It seemed to me that he was Liberal bashing more than he was actually talking about the budget.

I would like to take this opportunity to inform the member of what the Liberal Party believes in.

First, the Liberal Party believed in the Romanow report. Not only did the Liberals meet the Romanow report in support of our health system, but according to Mr. Romanow the Liberals exceeded what the report requested.

The Liberals believed in the Kelowna accord.

The Liberals believed in the Atlantic accord.

The Liberals believed in supporting our cities with billions of dollars of transfers.

The Liberals also believed in the lumber industry. The member for Burnaby—New Westminster was there when I chaired the committee that the Liberal government was supporting, so I do not know what the member is referring to.

We also believed in the NDP—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** I am going to have to cut off the hon. member there and give the hon. member for Outremont just 30 seconds to respond, please.

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair:** Mr. Speaker, I can inform my colleague that of the examples he gave us, the Kelowna accord, for example, was an idea that was 13 years late. The Liberals were there for 13 years. They did nothing. On the eve of an election, they said they were going to do something.

Let us look at what they did on climate change. The Liberals had the worst record in the world, with a 35% increase in greenhouse gas production in Canada for 13 years. As one of their five leaders said, they “didn't get the job done”.

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the speech by the member for Outremont. He did not talk about the great environmental benefits of the budget on massive carbon capture and storage and dirty coal-fired electricity.

The federal government has to act to reduce greenhouse gases and smog and pollution, because in my province of Ontario Dalton McGuinty is just not getting it done. We are going to bring in regulations requiring him to clean up his act. I am surprised that the hon. member, a former minister of the environment, did not mention the biggest corporate polluter in Canada. Do members know who heads that up? His name is Dalton McGuinty. He promised to close that down by last year and did not. Young children with asthma are suffering more because of that. Frail elderly seniors in Trinity—Spadina or Ottawa West—Nepean have to stay in their homes more often during smog days.

I wonder why the member did not mention more about the environment, because he was right in his last response when he said that greenhouse gas emissions did go up dramatically. Thank goodness we have a Prime Minister who is committed to getting the job done.

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair:** Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that Louis-Gilles Francoeur of *Le Devoir* summarized it best with an article entitled “La déviance canadienne”, or in English, “The Canadian deviance”. The environment minister's picture went with the article. Mr. Francoeur explained exactly what is wrong with the Conservative approach. There is no way we are going to meet our international obligations.

*Government Orders*

When I asked the minister what he was going to do about the billions of dollars this could cost Canada, he said he was going to send the bill to the Liberals. That is a cute quip in question period, but it does not answer a very serious question.

No, the Conservatives have shown that they do not understand the basic principles of sustainable development. If they did, they would be internalizing the costs.

For example, in Quebec the \$3 it costs to recycle a tire in Quebec is added to the price of the tire. It is not fair for someone who takes the metro or the bus to work to pay for somebody else to recycle their tires, right? That is a basic principle: user pay, polluter pay, internalize the cost, and do the life cycle analysis of the product. The Conservatives do not do that.

For future generations, the greenhouse gas costs are going to be in the billions of dollars. It has to be internalized. If we do not do that, we are going to wind up doing what the Conservatives are doing, which is giving out cheques to private companies. That does not work. The cost has to be internalized and passed along to the people who are using it. Polluter pay and user pay are basic principles of sustainable development.

• (1205)

**Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am proud to speak out against this budget bill because it is bad for immigrants, bad for our economy, and bad for Canada.

As an immigrant myself and as a member of this Parliament who represents one of Canada's most diverse communities, I am shocked that we are even debating such an amendment to Canada's immigration policy. I have heard from immigrant communities across Canada that are against the proposed sweeping changes in this budget implementation act.

[*Translation*]

I have heard reactions from communities across Canada that are very frustrated that these changes were made without consultations or studies. They are worried about the consequences this will have for families, and rightly so.

[*English*]

In Vancouver, I heard from communities that fear they will not be able to sponsor their relatives to join them from Vietnam, India, Pakistan and China. In Edmonton yesterday, I heard from Ukrainians, South Asians, Latin Americans and others who fear they will have an even harder time getting visitor visas than they already do. In Toronto, immigrant communities have joined together to fight these sweeping changes. No wonder.

Let us look at how this bill will affect these communities. It will introduce a quota system on immigration. It abrogates Parliament's responsibility to oversee Canada's immigration policy. It will facilitate queue jumping, with no accountability and no transparency. And it will support a fundamental shift in immigration policy, a shift to supporting industries that can best lobby for foreign workers and a shift away from family reunification and humanitarian causes.

The Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants says that with this bill Canada is moving away from its vision of immigrants as integral partners in the building of our country's future.

There are three amendments in the immigration portion of this budget bill that are fundamentally wrong. First, this gives the minister the right to discard applications, to pick and choose which types of immigrants and what type of work she wants them to do. If the minister thinks there are too many visible minorities or immigrants from particular groups in Canada already, she can pick a group of countries and discard applications from those countries. Or she can put the applicants from these countries at the bottom of the list and not process them for 10 years, if ever.

No wonder Mohamed Boudjenane of the Canadian Arab Federation called the changes "dangerous" and said that they could open the door to racial profiling.

No wonder Wayne Hanley, the president of the United Food and Commercial Workers, said that communities across Canada are profoundly disappointed, and he is opposed to allowing the minister the discretion not to process certain applications at all.

The minister said that Canada needs to bring in more workers and the profession she mentions most is that of doctor. However, the minister just deported a radiologist for no good reason and we need more radiologists.

This same minister and the Minister of Human Resources have failed to support a 42 year old doctor from the former U.S.S.R. who has been licensed in Canada but cannot find a residency to accept her because of her age. She is a rheumatologist and we need more rheumatologists. I know that because I hear from families in my community who are looking for this kind of doctor for their parents.

So really, this is not about skilled labour. It is about cheap labour. It is about what Karl Flecker of the Canada Labour Congress says is "creating a pool of disposable workers to do jobs at a wage that Canadians won't accept".

If this bill passes, ordinary Canadians will not be united based on humanitarian and compassionate grounds, with overseas family members left behind because of extraordinary circumstances.

As well, why is the government taking away the ability and the right of applicants for visitor visas to go to court if their applications are turned down?

I met Que Ton Hong in Vancouver two days ago. She is getting married in July, but she cannot bring in her family to attend her wedding. She cannot bring in the person who raised her, her mother, for this joyous occasion. This is a shameful way to treat any person, let alone a Canadian citizen. Today Ms. Hong can choose to take immigration officials to court to fight for her right to bring her mother to Canada to attend a wedding, but with the changes in this budget bill, she would not be able to do so.

The NDP believes a better way exists by having Canada follow the example of England and Australia, where applicants whose visitor visas are denied have a right to appeal to a tribunal without being charged extra costs. It will free up the court system and provide a no-cost alternative chance to appeal for people whose visas are denied.

*Government Orders*

•(1210)

Instead, the Conservative government is moving in the opposite direction, a wrong direction. No wonder Victor Wong of the Chinese Canadian National Council said that the council had a lot of concerns. He suggested that the government go back to the drawing board.

The NDP has a better solution to clear the backlog, to fix our immigration system, to expand the number of immigrants to Canada, to hire more staff in our overseas offices and here, and to change the point system to bring more families to Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "That" and substituting the following:

this House declines to give second reading to Bill C-50, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 26, 2008, and to enact provisions to preserve the fiscal plan set out in that budget, since the principles of the bill relating to immigration fail to recognize that all immigration applicants should be treated fairly and transparently, and it also fails to recognize that family re-unification builds economically vibrant, inclusive and healthy communities and therefore should be an essential priority in all immigration matters.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** The amendment is in order so the debate will resume on the amendment.

We will go to questions and comments. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member speak in favour of her amendment. I am quite surprised that the NDP would take that position after opposing every favourable immigration step that we have taken along the way.

I, too, have travelled across the country with that hon. member and heard from Canadians. What Canadians are in fact saying is that the current immigration system and the chaos in it is not good for Canada and not good for newcomers or employers. They are frustrated and upset and they want us to do something.

I will quote from the Vancouver *Province* editorial. It states:

Reform of Canada's immigration laws is long overdue...

But it makes no sense—and is unfair to applicants—to go on adding names to a waiting list that just grows longer and longer.

Wait times are in the nature of six or eight years. We need to get people in here in months and weeks. They are going to other countries and not actually coming through the system. I would like to know what the member has against shortening wait times, getting families reunited more quickly and getting the skills that we need into our country sooner.

The editorial goes on to state:

Under the new legislative proposals, the immigration minister will be able to speed up immigration procedures, both in cases of family reunion and to get needed workers into the country.

What the Tories are proposing is to bring order to the current chaos, while allowing immigration patterns to match national priorities.

Surely that is to the benefit of all Canadians, immigrants and newcomers included.

What does the member say to the employers, the employees and the newcomers who are frustrated by the years and years it takes to get into this country? What does she have to say to—

•(1215)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** The hon. member for Trinity—Spadina.

**Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I note that today the government had one speaker on the bill and no others. We will not be able to hear from the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration nor the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. We will not be able to hear any Conservative members of Parliament speaking in favour of their budget bill.

If the Conservative government or the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration are tremendously proud of the sweeping changes, why are these three elements, which are critically important and very negative for the communities, hidden and buried in a huge budget implementation bill of 136 pages, presented to the House of Commons on a Friday afternoon after question period, just before the Easter break?

It makes no sense. If this is so important it should be at the immigration committee for debate.

**Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the member for Trinity—Spadina and I am glad she touched upon the immigration issue.

I want to ask her a question to which, when I tried to look into the paperwork, I could not find an answer. When people make applications, which may be prolonged or put off, a certain administration fee is paid. Does she know or did she find out if these people are reimbursed for this expenditure if they are not successful applicants?

I was also saddened because there are other issues. The member failed to talk about housing, money for health care, money for students and money for the environment, all of which were not in the budget. I thought she would have touched upon those issues because they are as important as the immigration issue, which was done in a clandestine way, as she pointed out.

Could she tell us if she found it in the budget that these fees are reimbursed, or do people just lose them?

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** No, Mr. Speaker, not a penny of the applicants' fees has been refunded.

There is not a penny in the budget bill for affordable housing, for child care or to hire extra nurses or doctors, which is why it frustrates me to no end that the Liberal Party of Canada has no courage of its convictions to stand and be counted and vote against this terrible bill which is bad for the community, bad for the economy and bad for Canada. The Liberals should have the courage of their convictions and stand up for the immigrant communities of Canada.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member for Trinity—Spadina has not only heard me ask her a question but I will address some of her concerns as I speak for the next little while. The minister has spoken in the House of course, and she will hear from not only me and the minister but from all Canadians if this matter is put to a test because Canadians want us to be doing what we are in fact doing for immigration.

It is not a matter that is hidden. There is absolutely no limit on debate. This matter can be debated here and it will go to committee where further representations can be made. It is a fine time and finally time to deal with this matter in a positive way.

I am happy to speak to the New Democratic Party's ill-conceived amendment that seeks to stifle debate on Bill C-50, the government's budget implementation act. I say this because the NDP allegations in this motion are baseless, misleading and completely unfounded. We would see more immigrants coming in, more quickly and in a more efficient fashion than we have seen in the past.

However, we should not be surprised with the NDP, or the Liberal tactics for that matter, when it comes to immigration. When they cannot win a debate based on facts, they resort to fearmongering, but that will not wash. It will not happen.

Let us call it what it is. The NDP is playing politics by tabling this motion today. It is doing it to embarrass the Liberals, plain and simple. It is, quite frankly, shameful. While the NDP plays its petty little games, it is holding up vital legislation that is necessary for the socio-economic well-being of our country.

Before I address the NDP amendment itself, this debate on immigration needs to be put into context. Last year, under the strong leadership of our Prime Minister, Canada welcomed the highest number of newcomers in our history, 429,649, surpassing the previous high set almost 100 years ago. There will be continuing increases in the numbers we bring in.

This record number of immigrants admitted to our country is a reflection of our government's unequivocal and strong commitment to immigrants and immigration. Our government recognizes that immigrants and immigration are critical contributors to the socio-economic well-being of our country. Our government wants newcomers and their families to succeed. We want more immigrants and newcomers to come to Canada. We also want newcomer families to be reunited faster and skilled workers to come here sooner.

That is our priority but it is becoming more and more difficult, thanks to the massive backlog in immigration applications inherited from the previous Liberal governments. Successive Liberal governments stood by and watched the backlog balloon and mushroom from 50,000 to more than 800,000, and growing. Liberal neglect of the immigration system has resulted in a situation where those applying to come to Canada are waiting, on average, four to six years just to have their application looked at. That is not acceptable.

Canada is losing out on talented immigrants who are choosing to go to other countries such as Australia where the wait time is six months, not six years. It is unconscionable. Canadians expect better. Canadians will get better in this new proposed budget bill that we are putting forward on immigration.

Canada is losing out on talented immigrants. In fact, it comes as no surprise that other countries can claim that their best marketing tool is to attract immigrants because of Canada's long wait times. Put simply, our amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act would reduce the backlog created by the Liberal Party of Canada and result in shorter wait times for immigrants to come to Canada. By accusing us of shutting the door to immigrants, the Liberals and NDP are not only misleading Canadians and would-be immigrants, they are practising a low level shameful type of politics.

To mislead those who trust politicians and to prey on the fears of immigrant families is, simply put, not acceptable. Rhetoric and fearmongering aside, immigrants and Canadians deserve to know why the Liberals and the NDP want to keep families waiting for longer periods than they already are.

Canadian businesses deserve to know why the Liberals and NDP want to prevent them from getting the skilled and unskilled workers they so desperately need. As we travelled across the country, business people told us that they were frustrated. They are frustrated because they cannot meet the needs, they cannot progress and they cannot build and develop this country because they do not have the people resources they need so desperately. They are looking to us to do something positive and they say that finally something is being done.

● (1220)

On this side of the House, our position is clear. The minister has said on numerous occasions in this place, and it bears repeating, that our government is taking urgent measures to clean up the Liberal mess, so that more families can be reunited faster and more skilled workers can get here sooner.

The claims of the NDP and the Liberal Party that we are shutting the door on immigration is completely without basis and without fact. It was the Liberals who closed the door to immigration by letting the backlog balloon to unmanageable levels. Without our actions, wait times would rise to 10 years by the year 2012. This is completely and totally unacceptable. That would be an indication of a system totally in chaos and not functional.

One of the goals of this legislation is to respond to Canada's labour market needs, but let me be clear. These amendments will not apply to refugees and are not intended to affect family reunification at all. We want families to be reunited faster and we have made it a priority. Family reunification cases are now being done 20% to 40% faster than under the previous Liberal governments.

However, we want to do even better, and so in budget 2008 we have invested \$22 million for two years, growing to \$37 million per year. This funding will help us speed up the application process for those seeking to come to Canada.

*Government Orders*

These important steps are just some of the things we are doing to help newcomers. We have also cut in half the tax on immigrants that the Liberal Party implemented. We have invested \$1.4 billion into settlement programs that help newcomers with language training and help finding a job after the previous Liberal government had effectively frozen funding for almost a decade. We cannot bring newcomers in without having the support bases and the infrastructure to ensure that they can become what they can be and that they can succeed when they come here.

While the NDP and the Liberal Party claim they represent the best interests of immigrants, their track record speaks for itself. Both parties have voted against virtually every initiative we have taken to help newcomers come to Canada.

They opposed us cutting the Liberal immigrant head tax in half. They opposed us providing \$1.4 billion to help newcomers to Canada integrate and settle in our country. They opposed the establishment of the foreign credentials referral office, and the Liberals, while they were in government, allowed the backlog to balloon from 50,000 to over 800,000.

Now, incredibly, the Liberals and the NDP are opposing the very changes that would reduce wait times and allow more newcomers to come to Canada and reunite with their families. Canadians are not with them on this issue. Right across the whole spectrum of this country, people are not with them on this issue.

I have heard the NDP and Liberals suggest that we should simply devote more resources to processing applications. As I stated earlier, our government is indeed doing this, but money alone will not resolve the problem because the system itself has built-in inefficiencies. Foundational changes need to happen for it to be successful.

As the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration said yesterday, it is not enough just to throw money at it and put ourselves back into deficit, as the Liberals would have us do. We need to do better. We need to do it more efficiently. We need to do it smarter, and that is precisely what we are doing.

Under the current Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, we are generally required to process applications in the order that we receive them, and each application must be processed to a final decision. This undermines our ability to adapt to changing economic and labour market conditions.

For example, Canada might need medical technicians, pipefitters, plumbers and many other trades, but under the current system we cannot ensure that they can reach our labour market in a timely fashion, that we can get the right people to the right place at the right time. The system is failing us. The system is failing Canadians. The system is failing newcomers. The system is failing and we need to give it attention.

This is not fair to immigrants who want to come to our country, to those who are waiting for loved ones to join them, and to employers who want to hire skilled and unskilled workers. It is not in Canada's interests. It limits our ability to select people the labour market needs the most and it discourages many newcomers from applying.

The skilled and unskilled workers that Canada needs will not wait. They will go elsewhere and they have gone elsewhere. We must change our attitude and our legislation to ensure that does not continue. Our amendments would help bring the backlog under control and restore public confidence in the immigration system. Canada's immigration system would become more competitive with those of other countries.

Another fearmongering tactic that the NDP and the Liberals have been using is to accuse us of having an agenda to discriminate against newcomers based on their race, religion or ethnicity.

• (1225)

Nothing could be further from the truth. The minister's instructions will be charter compliant as the charter applies to those who would apply through the process. The minister's instructions will also be consistent with the objectives of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, referred to as IRPA. IRPA's objectives include: supporting Canada's economy, reuniting families, and providing protection to those who need protection. Our proposed amendments will not change that.

To be clear, our approach to immigration will continue to be universal and non-discriminatory. There will be no discrimination based on race, religion or ethnicity. Any assertions or allegations to the contrary are simply unfounded.

With respect to the criticism that too much power will be vested in the hands of the minister, let me be clear. The minister has said and she will consult with provinces and other key stakeholders prior to publishing instructions. The minister's instructions will be open and transparent. They will be published in the *Canada Gazette*. They will be reported in the annual report to Parliament and published on Citizenship and Immigration Canada's website.

Ultimately, at election time, the minister and this government will be held accountable to all Canadians for the decisions they take and I say that Canadians will be supporting these decisions.

If the Liberals are so opposed to improving our immigration system, they will have an opportunity to vote against the Budget Implementation Act and these provisions, but the fact is that no one takes the Liberal Party seriously because when it comes to backing up their own rhetoric by voting against our measures, they are either not found here or they do not vote.

They are interested primarily in self-interest, self-preservation and not the best interests of Canadians. If they truly believe their own criticism, they would do something about it because the reality is that the Liberals' prime objective is not to do what is right for the country but to obtain power. They will stop at nothing to avoid their responsibilities in order to preserve their best interests.

In this regard I would like to quote from the March 17 article by Angelo Persichilli in *The Hill Times*. In this article he states:

—however, what we don't need are lectures from the Liberals on this issue because, again, according to the numbers, not the demagoguery, they too badly mismanaged this issue for political reasons.



*Government Orders*

The difference between the Conservatives and the Liberals is that the former are handling immigration by trying to get results; the latter to get votes.

Therefore, the NDPers and Liberals can fearmonger all they want. The fact of the matter is our plan is getting strong support right across the country from ordinary Canadians, from newcomers, from stakeholders, from business, and I would challenge them to test that.

Let me quote from a March 15, 2008, editorial in the *Winnipeg Free Press*. It states:

What the Conservatives propose is common sense...This is good policy...For the Liberals to exploit this, however, not only ignores the national need for the party's own political advantage, but also ignores the ugly truth that it was the Liberals who created this problem...Canadians, new and old, have been offered a clear choice: Conservative policy that will benefit Canada, or politics that will benefit Liberals.

A March 24 *Vancouver Province* editorial had this to say about our proposed amendments:

Reform of Canada's immigration laws is long overdue. [...] What the Tories are proposing is to bring order to the current chaos, while allowing immigration patterns to match national priorities. Surely, that's to the benefit of all Canadians, immigrants included.

A March 17 *Globe and Mail* editorial had this to say:

Now, the Conservatives are proposing a bolder reform...But it stands to benefit our economy. Immigration policy...should first and foremost fit Canada's needs... he Tories surely anticipated how their opponents would misrepresent their policies. That they are pressing on regardless shows a strong commitment to this country's interests.

Time will tell when we look back to say that this was a historic moment, with the changing of the immigration policy, that ended up serving the needs of all Canadians and building this country to what it can be.

James Bissett, the former director of the Canadian Immigration Services and a Canadian diplomat, had this to say: "I entirely agree with the minister. It is a long overdue and badly needed fix of a system that's needed fixing for a long time. You can't keep people waiting for up to six years to get a visa to come here after they've met the requirements and have paid the fees. It's unfair and the minister is absolutely right in trying to step in and correct the situation".

• (1230)

Other immigrant stakeholders also expressed support for our plan. In an article in today's *National Post*, it states:

Wojciech Sniegowski, president of the Canada-Poland Chamber of Commerce in Toronto, said he's come to the conclusion there is no inherent danger in the proposals and that they are designed merely to give the minister flexibility to respond to labour shortages.

"The most important thing is that, if nothing is done, by 2012 the backlog will be such that people will be waiting 10 years for their applications to be heard. I'm glad to see the government doing something," he said.

It stands to reason. The article goes on to state:

Tom Pang of the Chinese Canadian Community Alliance in Toronto said the bill is good legislation. "It has everything to do with skills and it will bring the right type of people into Canada. Unfortunately, some people in the community think it is designed to stop people of certain ethnic backgrounds from coming to Canada but that is not what it is about," he said.

He is absolutely right on that point.

Contrary to what the Canadian Bar Association will have us believe, we are also getting support from various individuals in the

legal community. An article dated March 31 in the *Calgary Herald* states:

Edmonton immigration lawyer Shirish Chotalia said it's the start of creating a fairer system, because the government will be more forthcoming about what types of immigrants the country needs instead of giving people false hopes. "They want to consult with employers and target special skill sets as we go along," Chotalia said.

Another immigration lawyer, Warren Creates, told the CBC: "This is a very clever landmark change, I would call it, in overhauling the immigration program...it makes a minister accountable for explaining it and reporting to Parliament and therefore to the Canadian public".

David Garson, an immigration lawyer with Guberman, Garson, Bush, said the following, with respect to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration: "She's a tremendous individual and very pro-immigrant".

With respect to the NDP motion at hand, I must reiterate that nothing in our proposed amendments will take away from our commitments to family reunification and refugees. Our government recognizes that immigration is more than just economics. That is because our government understands the importance of families and the aim of reuniting them as quickly as we can.

As I said earlier, we have reduced by between 20% and 40% the processing times for those immigrants in Canada who are seeking to bring their family members to Canada from other countries. In fact, 80% of the applicants from sponsored spouses are now finalized within eight months.

Our government continues to embrace Canada's proud history of providing protection to those in need. We are a model to other countries. We will continue to be the model to other countries because of our generosity and compassion.

That is why the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration recently announced that we would double the number of Iraqi refugees we accept this year and, among other things, has also made commitments to bring in several thousand Karen refugees from Myanmar and refugees from Bhutan, two places that do not get a lot of media attention but where people are suffering nonetheless.

The changes we propose also would affect those in Canada seeking humanitarian and compassionate consideration of their applications to stay in this country. They can continue to make those applications and the legislation would not affect them.

Our proposed amendments would ensure that Canada's immigration program carefully balances its economic goals with its family reunification and refugee protection components.

Family reunification and refugee protection remain priorities for the Government of Canada and key components of our immigration program. Nothing in our proposed amendments will change that.

In closing, let me say that it is most unfortunate that the NDP are holding up desperately needed changes to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, changes that would make the immigration system more fair and more transparent.

*Government Orders*

Ultimately, the NDP and the other opposition parties will have to be accountable to the Canadian public for their attempts at preventing vital changes to the immigration system.

This proposed change will stand the test of time. This proposed change will dramatically reform immigration and make it more efficient, more acceptable, and in line with the Canadian public's views.

I urge all members of this place to oppose the NDP's obstructionist tactics and vote against this amendment.

● (1235)

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with a certain amount of amusement to the hon. member's speech about the virtues of the Conservative Party. I have three questions for him.

First, if the government is being so transparent and if these directives will be so transparent, will the government commit to put in legislation that directives should be submitted for review simultaneously to a committee of the Senate and a committee of the House, even if it is time limited consultation to preserve the flexibility for the minister?

Second, if this approach of the government is so popular, why are so many groups representing immigrants opposed to it?

Third, if the government is being so transparent, why is the government log-rolling this bill into a budget bill the way it is common practice to do in the United States Congress? Why is it log-rolling an immigration bill into a budget bill? Next will it be log-rolling environmental bills into Canadian heritage bills? Perhaps the member could enlighten us.

● (1240)

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that this amendment to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act is being debated in the House. It will be referred to committee and there will be the opportunity to call people to make representations. It is open and transparent.

I can say this in answer to the member's first and third questions, what this bill does is it makes it a confidence matter. It is a time to be tested. It is a time to find out whether the Liberals stand up for Canadians and want to be counted, to have an immigration system that is more efficient, an immigration system that will reduce wait times, one that will meet the economic needs of the country and build Canada. It will be a test.

The Liberals can stand up and oppose it, and if they do, we will go to the Canadian people and find out who is right and who is wrong. I say we have Canadians on our side. If the Liberals have the intestinal fortitude to do that, there will be that opportunity.

Is this popular? I have travelled across the country and I can say that employers are frustrated, newcomers are frustrated, Canadians are frustrated, because it takes too long to come to Canada. We are not competitive. We are not efficient. The majority of Canadians are saying it is time for some action. They want to see action. They are getting action.

This is the opportunity with Bill C-50 before the House. It is time for the Liberals to decide where they stand on this issue. Canadians will support us.

**Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in his speech the member talked about wait times and the backlog.

If it is only about the backlog, then why are there two more changes in this bill right now? Why are there changes as to who can be sponsored into Canada under humanitarian and compassionate grounds? Why is that clause in there? What does it have to do with the backlog?

Right now if a visitor meets all the criteria, a visa shall be given to the visitor. Another change in this bill says that the visitor may get the visa. It gives the minister and CIC enormous power and puts them above the law.

If it is only about the backlog, as the member said, then what do these two changes have anything to do with the close to 900,000 applications that are in the backlog? It does not make sense. Why make those two changes? They are not connected to anything with the application process.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that the proposed amendment does allow applications on humanitarian and compassionate grounds to continue to be made in Canada as they always have been made. It will not allow people to take advantage of the system by making numerous applications from without or plugging up the system as they have and making countless applications.

The fact is that humanitarian and compassionate grounds will continue to be respected and will be a vital part. It will continue unaffected.

The second part, of course, is that the minister in giving any instructions will ultimately be responsible to this House. It will be with respect to the broad purpose of ensuring that the goals established by the Government of Canada are met. That will be a fact.

Simply increasing numbers by putting more numbers into the system does not help us. If we have 850,000 applications and growing and we continue to receive applications and those people get to the back of the line with no hope of coming to Canada, that is not a system of any value to those who want visas to enter Canada in any category. It is simply incredulous. It is not acceptable. It is not good and it needs to be changed. This will do that.

● (1245)

**Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, speaking specifically to part 6 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and the proposed amendments, constituents in my riding have concerns and my colleagues have heard similar comments from across the country from communities which are looking at sustaining the growth and dealing with a skilled labour force. Our chamber of commerce, economical development commission, various business leaders in the community have approached me and asked that we make improvements.

*Government Orders*

Our colleagues throughout the different ministries, provincial ministers and the provincial nominee programs have helped with the expedited labour market opinions in bringing in labour forces as quickly as possible.

Could my hon. colleague elaborate on how these amendments will help our economy be sustainable and specifically ensure that we have the skilled labour force, whether they are medical professionals or tradespeople, throughout the community?

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that I would agree with the member. We have listened to the various stakeholder groups, employers and newcomers. There is a great degree of frustration in that they are not able to get people in when they need them. The system has become such that they cannot grow.

As recently as yesterday I heard from some employers that are expanding. They want to grow in Saskatchewan. We heard the same thing from Alberta and British Columbia. They were not able to do that because they cannot get the people they need with the required skills. They are saying that there is something wrong with the system, that it is not working. They have talked to me face to face and said that we must do something because they are frustrated. They want to go forward and they cannot because the system is broken. It is broken. It is not working. We cannot have skilled workers waiting for six years to come into Canada. They will go somewhere else, and they are going somewhere else. Our people are saying we must do something.

The amendment will allow those workers to be processed far quicker, more efficiently to get them when we need them.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, my question will be very brief.

Why did my colleague not answer the question from the member for Trinity—Spadina? Are the Conservatives not in the process of copying the Americans, particularly the American right, by including a clause in a budget bill that significantly changes social choices?

Why did they not table a bill in this House that would truly define a different way of managing immigration, where everyone is informed and there is a full debate in this House, instead of trying to slip a change in through the back door that has nothing to do with the budget, but has to do with social choices and societal choices?

[*English*]

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Mr. Speaker, far from it being a back door approach, it is using a front door approach where we can speak to it, discuss it and it will go to committee.

What it does do, and it is the Canadian way, is it will make all politicians, including the hon. member's cousins across the way, the official opposition, stand up and be counted, whether they are for it or against it. It will be a confidence motion that will test them to see who is right or wrong and to see if they are prepared to go to the Canadians.

This is the Canadian way. Ultimately Canadians will decide. We are giving the Liberals that opportunity to stand or not to stand, but Canadians want this done and we are doing it.

**Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary said that the legislation will stand the test of time. If that is the case, why not let the legislation stand alone? What is the government afraid of?

The parliamentary secretary talked about labour forces and getting people in. I can speak first hand as a member of Parliament having addressed that issue, bringing in people, workers, skilled people with no problems. Maybe the Conservatives do not know how the system works or the department is not working properly. Is that the case?

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Mr. Speaker, it will stand the test of time.

Thirteen years, six Liberal ministers, four majority Liberal governments and the Liberals did nothing for the system except continue it with a backlog of 800,000 people and growing. That is not governing.

We are taking decisive steps to ensure this country can be built. Thirteen years of inaction is not the answer. It is time to do something and we are doing it now.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as this is my first speech in the House of Commons, before I do anything else, I would like to thank the people of Willowdale for electing me and for expressing their confidence in me. Becoming a member of Parliament is a tremendous honour and privilege, and I look forward to doing the best job I can for the people of Willowdale and for all Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Scarborough Centre.

It is fair to say that when the Conservatives came to power two years ago they inherited the strongest fiscal position and the strongest employment growth in the G-7. With all of its inherited surpluses and until recently a strong economy, the government had an opportunity to make smart investments and wise tax cuts that would have strengthened Canada's productivity and competitiveness and better prepared the country for the uncertain times that confront us today.

We Liberals offered some advice. Last fall, the Leader of the Opposition said he favours deeper corporate tax cuts. We need to create a new Canadian advantage now that we can no longer rely on a relatively low dollar and we believe that a competitively low corporate tax rate is just that advantage. Interestingly enough, a few short weeks after the Leader of the Opposition's speech, the Conservatives acted on this Liberal proposal. At least they took our good advice.

*Government Orders*

Liberals have long been in favour of getting value out of taxpayers' money and shifting resources from areas of lower priority to areas of higher priority. Instead, the Conservatives chose to focus on reduced transfers to some of the most vulnerable in Canadian society, including literacy programs, the court challenges program, and programs to enhance the status of women in this country.

For a succinct analysis of the economic record, let me quote from a recent editorial in the *Globe and Mail*:

Which party took a country that was drowning in debt and instituted tough, painful savings to lift the federal accounts back into surplus, where they have remained for more than a decade? That would be the Liberals.

And which party, by failing to heed the warning signs of an economic slowdown and by both cutting the GST and spending as if there were no tomorrow, set the country up for a budget...that could, if the Conservatives don't watch their step, tip Canada back into deficit spending? That would be the Conservatives.

At the provincial level, in 2003, the finance minister and his Conservative friends in Ontario ran an election on a balanced budget and then lost. When Dalton McGuinty called in the auditors he was told he had inherited a \$5.6 billion deficit, and he had to clean up that mess.

At the federal level, here is a small history quiz. Before the current Prime Minister inherited large Liberal surpluses, who was the last Conservative prime minister to actually balance the books, even in one year? It was not Kim Campbell, Brian Mulroney, Joe Clark, or John Diefenbaker. It was not even R. B. Bennett or Arthur Meighen. No, we have to go back all the way to Sir Robert Borden in 1912 to find a Tory government that balanced the books. This is a pattern of Conservatives who run big, fat deficits until voters call on Liberals to clean up the mess.

True to form we have now seen the largest spending over two budgets in a row. The finance minister has become the biggest spending finance minister in the history of Canada. He has brought us perilously close to deficit spending with no longer any contingency. Canada's government is now 14% bigger after the last two budgets.

What do we want to bequeath to our children and their children? Certainly a low national debt, and we Liberals reduced that debt from a peak of over 70% of GDP in 1994-95 to 35% in 2005-06.

We now have a massive infrastructure deficit: bridges that fall down, potholes, raw sewage dumped into oceans, and inadequate public transit.

For the benefit of both current and future generations we urged the government, rather than pay the full \$10 billion allocated to debt paydown, to pay down that debt by \$3 billion and to provide an immediate \$7 billion injection into the infrastructure needs of the nation. This would have provided a significant down payment to address Canada's infrastructure deficit and would have been a much needed investment in our future. But no, this was good Liberal economic advice that the Conservative government did not heed.

●(1250)

I will stress that the Liberals understand the need to pay down the mortgage on the house. The Liberal government clearly did so when needed, but right now the walls are cracking and the roof is starting to leak. Our wonderful country has incredible potential, but we need

investment in infrastructure critical for our future productivity and global competitiveness.

However, here is a separate concern. Including legislative changes to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act in the bill is wrong. It is a blatant Americanization of the process to bury a contentious issue in a bill that, in weighing the alternatives, we otherwise did not find enough to warrant forcing an election on the Canadian people.

This clause has nothing to do with the budget. It should not be in the bill in the first place and should be separated out. These provisions put completely inappropriate discretionary powers into the hands of the minister, a minister and a government already showing ideological biases. We cannot fix the immigration backlog by allowing the minister to cherry-pick some over others. Doing so does not increase the numbers.

We cannot fix the immigration backlog without funds, either. Note that the Quebec government announced \$68 million in new funding for immigration. Ontario announced more funding, as did British Columbia. Contrast this to the relatively tiny amount the government has suggested will somehow miraculously do the work that is needed.

If the immigration provisions are not separated out of the bill, then the Liberal members of the Standing Committee on Finance will ensure that these added immigration provisions are subject to the full detailed and high scrutiny for all Canadians so they can fully understand what the government is trying to do with these back door tactics.

●(1255)

**Hon. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary for Canadian Heritage, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome the member to the House. I hope she will bring a new voting pattern to her colleagues.

She has spoken very forcefully about the immigration section of the budget. I choose to be in total disagreement with her, but I am not discussing the content of that issue. However, because she feels so strongly, will she be on her feet to vote against the budget, because that provision is a part of the budget, or will she continue to follow the sheepish aspects of her colleagues, who have chosen to sit on their hands through these confidence motions?

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his welcome.

I am not sure if it is procedure to ask a question in response to a question. When he says he disagrees completely with my position, he then denies me the ability to address any of his concerns because he simply refuses to discuss content.

I would ask the hon. member to ask a question on the content. If he supplies one, I might be able to answer.

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will address some of the content of the member's speech.

*Government Orders*

This government has paid down record amounts of debt and reduced taxes. Since the member seems to feel that paying down debt and reducing taxes is not a good thing, what does she propose in a budget? Perhaps increasing the GST to 7% might be something she would recommend the Liberals do. Maybe she would like to reduce the amount of money we spend on Canada's military, or child care, two key areas where the government has invested money, which has increased the overall budget.

What might she propose to do about things? Will she recommend that Liberals increase the GST in their next platform?

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** Mr. Speaker, I believe I specifically indicated some of the things Liberals would have preferred to see in this budget, including repeated suggestions that of the \$10 billion allocated to pay down the debt, we encourage the government to use \$7 billion to invest in infrastructure. We specifically suggested that amount because we very strongly feel that at least \$3 billion should be kept as a contingency. The government does not even believe in a contingency.

If the member has any other specific questions about the content of my speech, I would welcome them.

**Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the member opposite, and the Conservatives, got the facts wrong again. He asked if she would vote against the budget because of all these serious immigration issues in it. However, those issues were not in the budget. They did not come out until the little administration bill, which puts the budget into place.

Canadians across the country are outraged at that and have written their members of Parliament. On budget day, when major changes are announced for the country, nothing was mentioned about immigration. Yet when minor administrative amendments came out, which will put the budget into effect and which is probably almost totally unconstitutional, they were shocked.

Could the member comment on the totally anti-democratic actions taken by the government in the financial administration bill?

• (1300)

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** Mr. Speaker, I will reiterate a couple of key points I made in my speech. The inclusion of these immigration provisions in the budget, as the hon. member has said, is completely inappropriate. They were not in the original one. This is a blatant Americanization of the process, to include something that the government knew would be contentious into something that otherwise we were all prepared to allow to go forward. We will have to see what happens.

**Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, before I get into the budget implementation bill, I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate the member for Willowdale for her election. I am confident she will do a tremendous job, not only in serving her constituents but making our country a better country as well.

I have listened to the debate throughout the day. Instead of sometimes focusing on the points in the budget, people started talking about what the Liberals did, what the Liberals did not do. The NDP bashed the Liberals. The member for Peterborough bashed the Liberals. The Conservative Party bashed the Liberals. Everyone

was bashing the Liberals. However, it is not our budget; it is the Conservative budget.

Members have used a lot of quotes so then let me use some.

Earlier the Minister of the Environment said that he was disappointed that nothing had been said about the environment. He started quoting and talking about how important it was. At least the Liberals believe the environment is one of the most important issues, along with health care and our other social responsibilities.

I would like to use some quotes such as "Carbon dioxide is not a pollutant". Who said that? The current Prime Minister, and it is in *Hansard*, October 11, 2002.

Another quote is, "Carbon dioxide does not cause or contribute to smog, and the Kyoto treaty would do nothing to reduce or prevent smog". Who said that? The current Prime Minister, as reported in the *Toronto Star*, on June 10, 2004.

Another quote is, "the Kyoto protocol does not deal with critical environmental issues". Who said that? The current Prime Minister. That was in his address—

**Mr. James Bezan:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. As you know, we are discussing Bill C-50 and the amendment to Bill C-50 put forward by the NDP. I know there is some latitude usually given on second reading, but we are talking about the budget implementation bill. I ask the member to get on topic and on point and debate Bill C-50.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** I am sure the hon. member for Scarborough Centre will try to keep his remarks relevant to the bill.

**Mr. John Cannis:** It is relevant, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of the Environment brought it up, so if the member cannot take the heat, he should get out of the kitchen.

The next quote is:

My party's position on the Kyoto Protocol is clear and has been for a long time. We will oppose ratification of the Kyoto Protocol and its targets. We will work with the provinces and others to discourage the implementation of those targets. And we will rescind the targets when we have the opportunity to do so.

Who said that? It was the current Prime Minister, as reported in the *Ottawa Citizen*, on November 22, 2002.

That is the end of my quotes on the environment.

On the environment, the Conservatives did do one thing. They passed out light bulbs. That was how they were going to address the environmental issue.

It is a budget, and we are talking about various aspects within the budget. The Minister of Finance proudly stood up and talked about having to reduce taxes, and I agree. What the Liberals did, as my colleague from Willowdale said, was approach it in a balanced way. We reduced taxes, we reduced the debt and we put money toward programs that Canadians asked us to invest in, like child care, health care, post-secondary education, our cities, et cetera.

*Government Orders*

In the previous budget, the Conservatives hummed and hawed about how to reduce taxes. A Canadian sent us his tax form. He asked why the Liberals had reduced his taxes to 15% and now he paid 15.25%. In this budget, they have reduced it back to 15%. By doing this, they say they have lowered taxes. I do not know what math the finance minister learned, but I know that one and one equals two and that one minus three equals two.

We know his record when he was the finance minister in Ontario. The member for Willowdale alluded to the debt with which he left Ontario, unbeknownst to the incoming government.

The finance minister also did one shameful act, which Canadians are still paying for today, and that was the income trust fiasco. When the Liberals looked at it, we knew we had to address it, but we never made any decisions because of an election. This cost Canadians. Why? Because of the NDP.

Today the NDP has the audacity to stand and ask where the money is for social housing, or for the environment or for post-secondary education. Under the former Liberal prime minister, there were \$1.6 billion for affordable housing, \$1.5 billion for education, \$1 billion for the environment and half a billion dollars for foreign aid. I stood up in this honourable House and I supported those recommendations. We applauded them.

What did members of the NDP do? They betrayed not the Liberal Party; they betrayed their constituents, who today are asking what happened to that money.

My colleague earlier alluded to support for child care. This is not child care. This is handing somebody \$100 a month, which is taxable.

The member for Peterborough talked earlier about the money which was stolen. It is unfortunate he uses that type of language. Judge Gomery brought everything out and the culprits who indeed took money from Canadians were put before the courts and were charged, convicted and imprisoned.

At least we respected Judge Gomery's results. However, that party used Judge Gomery. Before committee, Judge Gomery expressed his disappointment that all the recommendations he put forward were thrown out by the Conservatives. Part of their victory had to do with Judge Gomery's commission.

The party talks about supporting our military. I have said before, I am a son of a veteran as well. We have stood in the defence committee with the chair, for whom I have great respect. We have done everything we can to support our military. Yesterday we had a vote on a motion from the member for Kitchener—Waterloo about lowering the flag on the Peace Tower. What a shameful display from the Conservative Party.

• (1305)

When the member for Mississauga—Streetsville has to go to the polls the next time and visit his constituents, he will have to answer why he betrayed them. He ran on a policy saying he was going to do this and he was going to do that, and the next thing we knew he walked over to the government. We Canadians are still waiting to see the famous report he put together when he went over to Pakistan. We still want to see it. We want to know how much it cost Canadians.

Anyway, I do not want to move away from the budget speech. Here is what one gentleman said some time ago, and I was really impressed, I must say, so I will quote him. He said that there is no greater lie “than a promise not kept”. Do members know who said that?

**An hon. member:** The current Prime Minister.

• (1310)

**Mr. John Cannis:** No, the current Progressive Conservatives of Newfoundland and Labrador, along with the Prime Minister, of course, because the Prime Minister went out and said to all Canadians that the Liberals wanted to tax Canadians' income trusts, that there was no way for seniors, for everybody; we swear, he said, and he signed it. What was the first thing he did? He went back on his word.

**An hon. member:** Absolutely.

**Mr. John Cannis:** He went back on his word. It was similar to the Chuck Cadman matter. We look him in the face and he says trust us. It is on tape. It is not something we said. It is on tape, so we are not even making it up.

The list goes on, but let me tell members where the government has failed. When we ask Canadians today what is the most important issue for them, they say health care. The Conservative government has put zero into health care. As a matter of fact, let me tell members what the Minister of Health said about the last budget when he was asked the question. He said the Conservatives would continue the funding that the Liberals put in. That is what they are going to do.

As the Liberal team, we stand on our record. We took over a country that was unofficially bankrupt, we straightened out the books, and we had surpluses never before seen in the history of our country. It reminds me of what a presidential candidate said: that the Clintons took care of the mess, the Bushes destroyed it, and now it is going to take Clintons to correct it.

The terrible Tories—which they are not, they are Reformers—really did a number on this country, whereas we took a mess, as Premier McGuinty has done, and corrected it, and now the Conservatives are about to destroy it.

I have one little closing statement. It is embarrassing to have the finance minister, as a member from Ontario, bashing Ontario. Shame on him.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if the member is wondering why everyone is picking on the Liberal Party, and why Canadians are picking on the Liberal Party, it is because we have a backlog of 800,000 in the immigration system. The wait times are long. They are up to six years. The Liberals voted against our \$1.3 billion in new settlement funding. They voted against the foreign credentials referral office. They voted against cutting the immigration head tax of \$975. Those are some reasons why everyone is picking on the Liberal Party.

Let me ask if the member knows who said the following:

*Government Orders*

The world looks to Canada like we have this great immigration system...but you're not doing the system justice by taking applications that aren't going to get processed for years and years and years.

It doesn't make any sense to us to be continually taking these [applications]...the reality is we need to change the system....

We need an immigration system that is in this regard more flexible and responds to employers, the provinces and our cities.

Who said that? It was said by the member for York West, the former Liberal immigration minister. I wonder if the member would agree with what the former Liberal minister said about what needs to be done in our system.

**Mr. John Cannis:** Mr. Speaker, in regard to what the then immigration minister, the member for York West, was saying, she simply was being honest, saying that every individual has the right to apply no matter what the circumstances, even if it is declined once.

At least we Liberals like to believe we live in a democracy, unlike the Conservative Party, where the members have to get permission before they go out to speak, and unlike its candidates, who most recently were not even allowed to speak to the media. The member for Willowdale knows that very well. I remember her commenting on television that she could not even get any debate. The media was going around to ask them questions and they did not pipe up; they were silenced.

The former immigration minister was correct. All these moneys the member is talking about, this government invested in labour—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** I am going to cut off the member there and go to the member for Yukon for a brief question and comment, and then I will try to get to the hon. member for Peterborough.

**Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, is the member embarrassed that the parliamentary secretary is giving false information on immigration when he is the one person who should know? First the parliamentary secretary suggested that in Alberta and Saskatchewan skilled people had to wait six years and the government could not do anything about it, but as we know, there is a provincial program. Being the parliamentary secretary, he more than anyone should know that the provinces have programs through which they can accelerate those people.

Then he said that those for whom the federal government is responsible are waiting four to six years, but we know the government is going to slow it down and it will be even longer because it is fast tracking some people and that will take up more resources. As well, the Conservatives are adding a piddling amount, as the member for Willowdale just pointed out, of less than 1%, so all those other immigrants who are waiting four to six years are going to be waiting even longer. Is that not an embarrassment for the government?

• (1315)

**Mr. John Cannis:** All I can add to that, Mr. Speaker, is that just the other day the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore, the deputy leader of the Liberal Party, clearly pointed out factually how the data the government is providing is completely inaccurate and false. He provided to the House the correct numbers and of course it was embarrassing to the government, which did not respond.

The Conservatives can say all they want to say in this hon. chamber, but the facts are the facts. The data is data and nobody can dispute it. Now I will wait to hear from the member for Peterborough. I look forward to it.

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I left my office this morning and rode over to the House of Commons, but apparently it is actually Yuk Yuk's here today because I have heard a presentation that sounds more like stand-up comedy than a speech in the House.

I would like to address a couple of things. First of all, the member has a staunch defence of Dalton McGuinty. I suppose he would like to defend the \$33 million slush fund. Perhaps he would like to defend the record tax increase by the McGuinty government in 2004 after its promise not to increase taxes. It then came back with the largest tax increase on record.

What I would really like to know from the member is this: does he really think CO<sub>2</sub> is an ingredient in smog? It is actually unburnt fuel. I would really like to know, because if that is his knowledge of the environment we know why the Liberals got nothing done on the environment.

**Mr. John Cannis:** Mr. Speaker, I am not defending Dalton McGuinty. I am defending my proud province of Ontario. Unlike that member who cannot stand up and call a spade a spade, I am defending the cities in Ontario that need support and which the government has completely neglected. I am defending the children of Ontario that the member and his party are neglecting. I am defending the seniors in Ontario that the member and his party are neglecting. I am defending the veterans of Ontario. I am defending all of Canada, which the Conservatives are not.

**Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, let us hope we can bring some order to this House and quiet down the debate to some reasonable and realistic comments.

I rise to speak to the amendment put forward by the NDP to effectively and substantially delay second reading of a very important piece of government legislation.

First, I must express my dismay with the NDP for defending the enormous immigration backlog in this country. The NDP members stand in this House and say that they stand up for immigrants, but they actually are putting forward an amendment that will delay a process which will actually improve and speed up the immigration process.

The backlog, of course, is keeping families apart and is denying Canada the much needed talent and skills that we require to improve our competitiveness and ensure our long term economic prosperity. By extension, that backlog is threatening Canada's quality of life and the strength and the integrity of the social safety net that the NDP claims to champion.

The NDP members, along with their Liberal and Bloc friends, say they support a vibrant 21st century economy. They offer no solutions to address the serious labour force challenges that our country is facing. They fail to recognize that Canada is in fierce competition with other countries to attract the skilled immigrants who have the talent and the training to meet these challenges.

*Government Orders*

My hon. colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, spoke at length on the need to proceed with these valuable and much needed reforms. I am going to speak to some of the other important measures that these political games are delaying. They are delaying benefits to Canadian families and businesses. We will make it loud and clear to all Canadians that it is the NDP members, along with their Liberal and Bloc allies, who are to blame for these delays.

Bill C-50, as with all our previous budget bills, is primarily about making a positive impact on the lives of Canadians, who for too long were overtaxed and poorly served by their federal government. We committed to changing that and we remain committed to delivering positive results for Canadians.

I know the NDP is never happy about Canadians keeping more of their hard-earned money, but I can assure members that Canadians certainly are excited about the tax-free savings account or, as we call it, TFSA. With the tax-free savings account, budget 2008 provides Canadians with the most important savings vehicle since the introduction of the RRSP. This flexible, registered, general purpose account will allow Canadians to watch their savings grow tax free. The reaction has been almost overwhelmingly positive in support of this TFSA.

I ask members to listen to the words of Finn Poschmann, director of Research at the C.D. Howe Institute. He said:

This tax policy gem is very good news for Canadians, and [the finance minister] and his government deserve credit for a novel program.

Budget 2008 also provides for an increase in the northern residents deductions of 10%, effective for the 2008 tax year, a move with broad positive support, even from the NDP.

Let us listen to the words of NDP member for Western Arctic, who said that it is a positive first step. I note for that particular NDP member the disappointment that his constituents, in the form of a recent *Yellowknifer* editorial, have already indicated in regard to his first vote against the budget:

Considering the NDP won't form a government at any time soon, it would have been best had [the NDP member from Western Arctic] swallowed the pill and voted with the [Conservative] government.

Let us imagine how much more disappointed they will be in him once they hear that their member is now trying to delay this positive step.

I hear on a daily basis from the NDP that the government is not paying enough attention to the challenges faced by our students. Budget 2008 is a generous budget for students and goes a long way to address the neglect they suffered under the previous Liberal government.

• (1320)

Through Bill C-50, the government is committing \$123 million over four years, starting in 2009-10, to streamline and modernize the Canada student loans program and expand online services for students, enabling them to manage their student loan accounts online.

It would provide further support for Canadian students with a \$350 million investment in 2009-10, rising to \$430 million in 2012-

13, in a new consolidated Canada student grant program that would reach 245,000 college and undergraduate students per year when it takes effect in 2009. That is almost 100,000 more students than the previous program that we are replacing.

One can imagine students' disappointment once they hear of today's delays.

We recognize that small and medium businesses are the backbone of our economy and our government is committed to fostering an environment that enables them to thrive.

Budget 2008 would benefit small and medium-sized businesses by improving the scientific research and experimental development tax incentive program and easing the tax compliance burden by reducing the record-keeping requirements for automobile expense deductions and taxable benefits.

We believe that Canadians share our desire to see more of our seniors maintain their independence for as long as possible. This government also recognizes that our seniors will have a valuable contribution to make to our economy, which is why we are investing \$60 million per year to ensure that low income seniors who work can realize greater benefits from their earnings through an increase in the guaranteed income supplement exemption. This is one of the most innovative and promising initiatives put forward in budget 2008 and addresses, head on, a serious challenge faced by Canadian society.

Through Bill C-50, we will invest \$110 million in the Mental Health Commission of Canada to support five innovative demonstration projects across the country to develop best practices to help Canadians facing mental health and homelessness challenges.

The protection of its citizens is one of the most important responsibilities of a government. We are committed to following through with the resources to show Canadians we take that responsibility very seriously.

To back up our commitment, Bill C-50 provides \$400 million through a third party trust for provinces and territories to support their efforts in recruiting 2,500 new front line police officers.

This government believes we can never fully enjoy the benefits of our hard work and unique joys of being fortunate enough to live in a country like Canada if we do not protect our environment as well. Clean air, clean water and clean land are not only what Canadians deserve, they are the bedrock ingredients of our long term prosperity and success as a country. That is why our government has made, and will continue to make, substantial investments in protecting our environment.

Bill C-50 allocates \$500 million in 2007-08, through a third party trust, on a provincial-territorial per capita basis, for public transit infrastructure and sets aside \$250 million for a full scale, commercial demonstration carbon capture and storage in the coal-fired electrical sector.



*Government Orders*

As we can see, Bill C-50, the first budget implementation act for 2008, is filled with positive news for Canadians, news that I would have thought the NDP could support and should support. It contains targeted and timely funding to address many of the challenges that our country is facing while, at the same time, introducing the tax-free savings account, one of the most innovative and welcomed savings vehicles to come along since the RRSP.

I encourage the NDP and all opposition parties to put aside petty partisan wrangling and support Bill C-50. If they cannot see their way to doing that, they should at least get out of the way and stop delaying such important legislation.

• (1325)

**Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for bringing the debate back to a reasonable level.

First I have a comment and then a technical question on the Bank of Canada.

The member pointed out one of the flaws in the budget related to the territories when he explained that the funding for public transport and police was on a per capita basis. As he knows, we do not have very many per capitas so that turns out to be roughly \$180,000 for the territories which are somewhat bigger than every country in Europe. We get in the order of one police person and expenses, which is not significant and not sufficient.

Because the member is the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, my question is more of a technical question relating to the changes in Bill C-50 in relation to the Bank of Canada.

The bill provides more flexibility for the Bank of Canada in its investments or more modernization so it can use new tools. I would like the hon. member to explain to the public, which would always be worried if our finances could be invested more liberally, what protections these new changes would bring to the Bank of Canada to ensure these investments would still be safe.

**Mr. Ted Menzies:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from Yukon, not only for his question but also for being one of four members of Parliament who actually showed up to a technical briefing to discuss Bill C-50. I applaud that. The member is obviously concerned for his constituents and wants to know the impact and benefits that will come from the budget implementation bill that we are presenting today.

It is actually a delight to get a technical question and if the hon. member will please forgive me, I will make sure that I am very concise on this.

It is because of the turbulence in our financial markets and in the markets of the United States that the Bank of Canada Act, we realized, needed some improvement, some flexibility. We have made sound improvements that would provide more liquidity and flexibility to the Bank of Canada to react in what may be continuing turbulent times.

We are very confident. These changes came from discussions with the Bank of Canada. They are positive and are well supported by the industry. I thank the member for raising that question.

• (1330)

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I take exception to a number of comments the member made with regard to New Democrats. In particular, one of the responsibilities of each member of Parliament is to consider any piece of legislation that is before the House and to weigh both the pros and cons of that piece of legislation.

The member cherry-picked, as I will, from the budget implementation bill and a proposed amendment by the member for Trinity—Spadina around the impact on our constituents and other Canadians.

Over the last several months, my riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan has reeled from the number of closures in the forestry sector, whether it is logging or supporting companies. We recently had another company that manufactures equipment for logging companies go into receivership. As a result, we are seeing rising poverty in my riding.

I want to talk about housing. The member talked about the investment with the Mental Health Commission in pilot projects. Pilot projects simply will not house all the people who are without adequate, affordable or safe housing.

Recently, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities specifically called for a national program that would look at ending chronic homelessness, rehabilitating and preserving existing social housing stocks, building new affordable housing and reducing the backlog of people needing affordable housing. I know that other organizations have called for a national housing strategy.

I wonder if the member could comment on the inadequacies of the budget implementation bill in addressing what has been called a national housing crisis in this country.

**Mr. Ted Menzies:** Mr. Speaker, I gave a speech earlier today about the connection that this budget brings to the issue that has never been addressed in this House before. The studies have shown us a direct link between mental illness and homelessness. This budget is the first time that this government has addressed that direct link.

We have pilot projects in place to further that work, to find if in fact there is a connection, and how to address that connection. That is groundbreaking work in this House and I applaud our finance minister for recognizing that.

Now that I have the floor and we are talking about NDP support or lack of, I might remind the House, if I can bring it back to the amendment, that we have tried on many occasions to improve the immigration system without opening the act.

We found that the NDP voted against cutting the \$975 immigrant head tax. When we tried to increase the number of foreign credential referral offices, the NDP voted against that. It also voted against the \$1.3 billion in new settlement funding for newcomers to Canada. It then brings forward an amendment to tell its supporters, in reduced numbers, of course, that it actually does care about immigration shortfalls in this country and that it does care about a backlog.

I find the NDP's arguments ring rather hollow when we see its voting record on immigration.

*Government Orders*

[Translation]

**Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I have a few questions for the hon. member, whom I worked with in the past on international trade. I am familiar with his economic policies and liberal economic values.

Three points particularly drew my attention and go against the values held by Quebecers. He talked about the tax-free savings account. He praised the government for lowering the GST and lowering taxes. He also talked about older people who work and who are effectively entitled to receive more money from the guaranteed income supplement.

Let us begin with the first point, the tax-free savings account. Can the member tell me what the real intention is behind this new tax tool? After the budget was presented, most economists and analysts really questioned its relevance. It was even noted that the budget does nothing to encourage people to save over the long term. He referred to vehicle purchases, that is, short term purchases and the like.

First of all, can he tell me if the government's intention was not actually to create a diversion? He says it is the most important invention since the RRSP. It is simply to create a diversion. There are countless unused RRSPs, which people could start using at any time, and which would plunge the government into an enormous deficit. Thus, is it not rather to create a diversion?

Second, how is it that older people have to go to work in order to be entitled to a supplement—

•(1335)

[English]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** There is one minute left for the hon. parliamentary secretary.

**Mr. Ted Menzies:** Mr. Speaker, I am sure I cannot qualify all of the answers in one minute. I might just very quickly point out that our budget did provide \$90 million to extend the targeted initiative to older workers. I would remind my hon. colleague that mine are not Liberal values. Mine are Conservative values and I do value the time spent on committee with the hon. member.

If I could deviate a little bit, there was one false statement made today by the mover of this amendment, the member for Trinity—Spadina. She said that the funds would not be reimbursed to the applicants whose applications were not accepted. That is absolutely false and that needs to be put on the record. All applicants who are not accepted will be completely reimbursed, just to get that factually correct on the record.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am going to pick up on what I was saying the day after the budget was brought down, when we heard a number of Conservative MPs say that this budget was extraordinary and good for Canadians. Again, it may be good for Canadians, but it is not good for Quebecers. We came to that conclusion after a rather careful analysis. There is practically nothing in the budget that corresponds to what the Bloc Québécois asked for before it was tabled by the Conservative government.

This Conservative government is showing us through its right-wing ideology that it is truly quite far removed from the interests and values of Quebec. With this budget we truly feel that the government did not meet the expectations expressed by the Bloc Québécois with respect to its interests and values. Hon. members will recall that the day after the budget was tabled, the vast majority of the daily newspapers and media in Quebec gave their impression on this budget, and it was clearly unfavourable.

Mr. Dubuc's column in *La Presse* read:

This lack of vision can be explained by the conservative philosophy of the prime minister's government, which does not believe in the role of the state and avoids economic intervention like the plague. It is an outdated, dogmatic conservatism that is not found anywhere else in the west.

The Bloc Québécois made its requests a long time in advance and on many occasions. These requests focused on the manufacturing and forestry industries, which are currently dealing with an unprecedented crisis in Quebec. These requests have been completely swept aside and forgotten in this budget, as though they were not important.

This budget lacks vision. The Bloc Québécois will most certainly vote against the budget implementation bill we are currently discussing.

I come from a riding, Saint-Maurice—Champlain, where the problem in the forestry industry I was just talking about is extremely serious. Pulp and paper companies are closing one after the other. There is some doubt as to whether the ones that are still around will get through this crisis. The many sawmills in the north of the riding, in the La Tuque area, are closing one after the other, some temporarily, others permanently.

We had hoped that the Conservative government would truly hear and acknowledge the Bloc Québécois demands. It should provide much greater support to the manufacturing and forestry sectors to help them through the current crisis. But the only assistance to the manufacturing sector went to Ontario. That is truly deplorable. Quebec was quite obviously forgotten in this budget.

Earlier, I was speaking about the media. The members will recall that, the day after the budget was tabled, the Quebec Minister of Finance also said that the budget did not meet Quebec's expectations. She said:

I am disappointed because there was a \$20 billion margin in the context of an economic slowdown. We were hoping the government would do more for older workers and for the manufacturing and forestry industries in Quebec.

Ms. Jérôme-Forget's comments were made the day after the budget was tabled. There was a surplus of \$10.5 billion available. The government could have allocated a sizeable amount, as the Bloc Québécois has been recommending since last fall, to support businesses, plants and workers. It could have allocated \$3 billion to debt repayment, which would have been reasonable in any case. But it has acted according to the Conservative ideology. The Conservatives did as they pleased and applied \$10.5 billion to paying down the debt, which, in light of what is going on in Quebec, is unacceptable.

*Government Orders*

● (1340)

As I said earlier, considering these obvious facts and the positions taken in the budget that go against the interests of Quebec, the Bloc Québécois will certainly not vote in favour of implementing this budget. The 2008 budget does not meet any of the conditions set out by the Bloc Québécois. We stated our conditions for supporting the budget, but hardly any of them were met.

As I was saying before, this budget does not provide any direct and immediate assistance to the manufacturing and forestry industries, which are experiencing a major crisis, or to the workers and communities affected by this crisis. The biggest problem of the crisis is that individuals, the people in the cities, municipalities and regions, are the ones hardest hit by the crisis, in terms of their family, personal and community lives. They are the ones who have trouble making ends meet at the end of the month or who cannot pay back the bank drafts and loans they took out, often to purchase equipment in order to work. I am talking about self-employed forestry workers, for example, who must take on the cost of the required machinery themselves. The government has done nothing to help these people.

There is no assistance for workers and communities, except the \$1 billion trust over three years, of which Quebec will see only a small part. We are talking about approximately 24%, which is not even representative of the size of the manufacturing and forestry industry relative to Canada. Quebec will have access to only a small amount, while the sectors that are not even affected by the manufacturing and forestry crisis—or barely—will receive a share of the \$1 billion on a per capita basis. This is assistance they do not need because they already have an industrial structure to help them through such crises. This is not the case in Quebec.

There is another reason why the Bloc Québécois will not support this bill. It has to do with the whole issue of seniors. During the election campaign, the Conservative Party promised to give full retroactivity to people who had not received the guaranteed income supplement, which the Liberals clearly and deliberately kept quiet about. Thousands of seniors in Quebec do not receive the guaranteed income supplement. They were receiving their old age pension, but they did not know they were entitled to a supplement.

The Liberals did not tell them. The Conservatives, on the other hand, promised them full retroactivity. However, once in power, as soon as they formed the government, their memories failed them and now they forget. This situation once again penalizes our most vulnerable citizens, seniors. How could the Bloc Québécois support such a Conservative budget? We find it completely unacceptable.

There is another factor to consider and another reason why we will not support this budget: the environment. This budget continues to favour polluters in the regions that pollute the most. They are implementing systems that allow industries and businesses, particularly oil companies, to benefit from tax credits and continue to pollute even more. As we all know, since 1990, many communities and businesses in Quebec have taken steps to reduce the amount of greenhouse gases in our atmosphere. Instead of being rewarded, these efforts by Quebec businesses are being penalized and more is being given to those who pollute the most.

● (1345)

This is absolutely unacceptable. Once again, it is part of what we call this right-wing ideology, which favours certain areas, such as natural resources, including the oil sector.

Another important element for the Bloc Québécois is culture. This budget does not contain any measures to promote cultural development in Quebec. The film industry is penalized, and funding has been cut once again. Yet the whole cultural, literary and artistic realm in Quebec is a flourishing industry. It needs substantial support from the federal government, which would give meaning to the whole question of the Quebec nation. Developing Quebec's culture would develop its distinctiveness, but the government is not interested.

Once again, a parallel can be drawn between a budget proposal such as this one and the recognition of the Quebec nation, which the government likes to boast about. Yet when the time comes to walk the talk, the government forgets all about it and does not take any real action. It just pays lip service to the idea.

There is another especially important element. I am talking about the government's will, as expressed in this budget. The Minister of Finance has announced that he intends to create a single securities commission, even though the whole financial community in Quebec is against this idea. This is absolutely unacceptable. Moreover, this issue has already been dealt with. This is one budget measure that is a huge stumbling block for us. It is a real source of conflict for us.

I could go back to all the elements in the budget. I was talking earlier about the manufacturing and forestry industries. Even after the vote on the budget had taken place, the Conservative members on the Standing Committee on Finance agreed to hear a series of people to really understand the extent of the crisis in the manufacturing and forestry industries.

What is happening in the manufacturing sector in Quebec and elsewhere, but particularly in Ontario and Quebec? The budget does not provide anything more for this sector, but right after the budget passed, the Conservatives and the other members on the Standing Committee on Finance approved a motion introduced by my Bloc Québécois colleague, the vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Finance.

The committee agreed to hear witnesses. The motion read as follows:

That the Committee, in view of the serious challenges faced by the forestry and manufacturing sectors, engage in a study on direct assistance measures and fiscal environment consisting of no more than four consecutive meetings—

For four meetings, we heard from people who came to tell us what they thought the manufacturing and forestry sectors in Quebec, and Ontario too, needed to get through the crisis. There was consensus.

*Statements by Members*

We heard from Jayson Myers, president of Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters; Claudette Carbonneau, president of the CSN; Pierre Laliberté, political advisor to the FTQ for the manufacturing sector; Avrim Lazar, president and CEO, Forest Products Association of Canada; Phil Vinet, mayor of Red Lake; Jean Laneville, an economist with the Quebec federation of chambers of commerce; Ms. Peterson, mayor of Thunder Bay; and Guy Chevrette, of the Forest Industry Council.

These people were nearly unanimous—nearly because they did not use the same words, but they all meant the same thing—in their assertion that the forestry and manufacturing sectors are going through such a serious crisis that the government must change its policy and its budget accordingly.

•(1350)

They also said that the government had to use part of its \$10.5 billion surplus to help a dying sector. The witnesses all told us that the Conservative government is clearly taking the wrong approach with its budget and its plan, which offer no direct assistance to the industries in these sectors, and that it must change its approach.

Until now, we have not heard anything to suggest that it plans to change anything. We think that the Conservative government put forward a budget that favours oil companies because it offers corporate tax cuts. As we have said before, tax cuts for companies that are not making a profit are not really tax cuts. But when companies are making profits in the millions or billions, they do benefit from tax cuts. This brand of economic liberalism is hurting Quebec businesses that, as we know, for the most part, did not make a profit in the past year.

What to do? We could try to further analyze this budget and find some justification for it, but there is none. There is nothing in the budget, whether it is for the status of women—which garners just one paragraph, six lines, to improve the status of women—or for employment insurance, where the demands of the Bloc Québécois have been completely ignored.

With regard to aboriginal peoples, they have significant needs in terms of social housing in particular. But there is nothing for them.

That can be said about any area. However, the government has envelopes for defence. When you are in favour of increasing military action and you join forces with the American government to continue the war in Afghanistan, you will definitely put more money in those envelopes. However, what is important to Quebec citizens right now is the injection of additional dollars. More money could have been allocated to regional development so that the Government of Quebec, which is familiar with the needs of each region, could have taken much more targeted action to foster greater investment in regional development.

The budget has an impact on many areas. Unfortunately, it does not contain what the Bloc Québécois wanted, that is major investments in the manufacturing sector, as I mentioned earlier. For these reasons, it is quite understandable that the Bloc Québécois will not support the implementation of this budget.

•(1355)

[*English*]

**Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Liberals had three important programs. One had to do with retrofitting houses for those who could not afford to do so. Another was the SCPI program with respect to homelessness. The other was a program to make houses more efficient in order to cut down on greenhouse gases. These were all popular programs but the Conservative government cut all of them. A couple were put back in a smaller way but they are harder to access. Unfortunately, some of these programs are expiring next year. People need these programs.

I hope the member will support us in our call to have the government increase the figures at least to where they were for retrofitting houses, for homelessness, and for more efficient housing. It is hoped that the government will extend these programs beyond 2009 so that people most in need in our country are not kept in limbo again.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for the question. He asked me if he would have our support on certain measures that have been cancelled by the Conservatives.

I remind him that each time bills are put forward—bills about reinstating programs—we evaluate each one thoroughly, and we will continue to do so.

However, I remind him that we will continue to do so if we can see that there is something in it for Quebeckers. If we believe that these measures will allow Quebeckers to continue to access good services and that they can benefit from the measures he is talking to me about, eventually and with the right to change our mind, there is a strong possibility that we will support him. We have presented very important demands about social housing, the environment—greenhouse gas emissions—and about the justification for providing the homeless with better services.

In my opinion, that is what I believe to be the party line.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** There will be seven and a half minutes at the end of question period for any further questions and comments at that point.

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

### OIL HERITAGE

**Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to inform the House about a historical Canadian event that is taking place in my riding this year.

*Statements by Members*

Lambton County is the birthplace of the oil industry in Canada and the world. The village of Oil Springs is home to the site of the first commercial oil well in North America which was dug in 1858. This area is also home to Canada's first oil gusher, first oil exchange and first oil company. Today oil is still being produced using the same techniques used by early oil producers.

To commemorate this 150th anniversary many events are occurring from February to December. I invite everyone to visit us and listen to the music of the working jerker lines, operate a spring-pole drilling rig, let one's nostrils tingle with the sweet smell of black gold, and discover the stories of Lambton's foreign drillers who helped drill many of the great oil fields around the world.

To uncover a truly fascinating oil history and heritage that changed our lives as Canadians, come and celebrate Canada's oil history in Samia—Lambton.

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● (1400)

**DAVENPORT COMMUNITY BUILDERS AWARDS**

**Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to pay tribute to six outstanding community builders who are all recipients of the annual Davenport Community Builders Awards.

The Dovercourt Boys and Girls Club is an organization that provides a safe and healthy environment for the children across the Davenport community.

Jack Fava, a dedicated community activist, has worked hard to make our community safer.

Reverend Kate Merriman is a member of the board of directors St. Clair West Affordable Housing Development Group and is very active in the community.

Virginia Novak is a strong advocate and community leader committed to making Toronto a safer place for residents, families and businesses.

Nick Saul is executive director of The Stop Community Food Centre, an outstanding community organization.

Margaret Smith is committed to making the St. Clair Avenue West area of Davenport a better place to live and work.

On behalf of the residents of Davenport, please join me in congratulating these exceptional community leaders. Their work is appreciated by all residents of our community, the city of Toronto and the people of Canada.

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[Translation]

**CANADIAN CANCER SOCIETY**

**Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, from Thursday, April 3 to Sunday, April 6, the Canadian Cancer Society will once again bring a touch of sunshine and happiness to all corners of Quebec with Daffodil Days, which kick off the society's annual fundraising campaign. Thousands of daffodils will spring up everywhere. More than two million daffodils will be sold by 12,000 volunteers in some 2,600 points of sale throughout the province.

Daffodil Days, which have been held for more than 50 years, have made the daffodil the official emblem of the Canadian Cancer Society and a symbol of hope and courage. In 2008 in Quebec, 41,000 new cases of cancer will be diagnosed and 19,500 people will die from this disease. But there is a ray of hope, because at least 50% of all cancers can be prevented through healthy lifestyles.

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[English]

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, with the arrival of April, our thoughts finally turn away from an exceptionally snowy winter and we start to look forward to summer. Canadians are famous for talking about the weather, but never before have our weather chats carried with them such concern for the future of our planet.

Most of us know that it is human activity that is responsible for putting too much strain on our earth. While the Conservatives may still be in denial, most ordinary Canadians are exploring ways to take action on climate change. I am looking forward to joining them at this year's Earth Day celebrations in Hamilton.

On April 26 I will be at the 12th annual Earth Day tree planting at Princess Point where the Earth Day 5 kilometre walk and fun run will also conclude. Other Earth week events include the eco-festival, the Go Green Challenge and the film festival.

It is only fair that if Canadian families are willing to do their share, so too should the big polluters and the government. Unfortunately, after 20 years of promises to get the job done, we are still waiting. The Liberals did not do it and the Conservatives will not do it. Only the NDP's climate change accountability act will do it.

I urge all MPs to join ordinary Canadians by focusing on environmental solutions and passing Bill C-377 today.

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**ONTARIO CORPORATE INCOME TAX**

**Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to announce that this Conservative government is helping every Ontario business.

Starting today the Canada Revenue Agency will assume most of the Ontario Ministry of Revenue's corporate tax administration functions, such as audits, appeals, objections and rulings.

This government will reduce the burden on Ontario businesses by streamlining the administration of Ontario's corporate income tax. This means that Ontario businesses will now have a single tax return and a single set of tax rules which will save millions of dollars and hours of time.

*Statements by Members*

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce said, “This streamlining will save Ontario businesses \$100 million to \$150 million each and every year in time and money creating room for more investment in the things that will make our economy grow, like human capital, new equipment, and research and development”.

Unlike the previous Liberal government, this government has taken action to ensure that Ontario businesses are even more competitive in the global economy. Once again, this government is getting the job done.

\* \* \*

**BOBBY ORR**

**Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, a great Canadian and one of my personal heroes recently turned 60 years young the other day.

But Bobby Orr does not look a day over 40. The brush cut is gone and so are the knees, but he has had them replaced. Otherwise, he is still that crazy defenceman from Parry Sound, who should have been a power forward.

Bobby Orr was probably the greatest natural hockey player of all time. Trained on backyard ice and tempered by long, cold Canadian winters, he knew the game like an Arctic wolf knows its prey. Fearless, fast and deft, he was a relentless hunter, puck in net no matter what.

Life after hockey has shown him to be a great Canadian in other ways. In 2005 he supported the Royal Oaks Golf and Country Club's tournament to raise money for breast cancer research in my own riding of Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe. That event generated \$100,000. His support of cancer research at L'Hôpital régional Dr-Georges-L.-Dumont in greater Moncton has been generous and ongoing.

Bobby Orr earns the gratitude of all Canadians for his work both on and off the ice. He is truly a great Canadian.

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• (1405)

**GERARD KENNEDY**

**Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring up a fella who seems to have fallen off the face of the earth. This person is Mr. Gerard Kennedy.

Mr. Kennedy is now the Liberal intergovernmental affairs critic and the critic is absolutely correct. When Mr. Kennedy was minister of education in the province of Ontario, he was very critical of the former Liberal federal government.

He said to the Liberal government and to the member for Markham—Unionville:

I think what's dangerous for Canada is a country that doesn't show the capacity to solve problems.

He also said:

There's a billion dollars missing in transfers on health and post-secondary education from the federal government.

You know what, Mr. Speaker? Mr. Kennedy was right, but the former Liberal government did nothing to solve this problem. Do

you know who solved it, Mr. Speaker? This Prime Minister and this finance minister.

So now that Mr. Kennedy is the Liberal intergovernmental affairs critic, I ask the Leader of the Opposition to stand in his place and apologize to Ontarians and poor Mr. Kennedy for never listening and never addressing Ontario's financial needs.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**KYOTO PROTOCOL**

**Mr. Marcel Lussier (Brossard—La Prairie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday in Parliament, the three leaders of the opposition signed a pledge requiring Canada to make a firm commitment during negotiations for a post-Kyoto agreement.

By participating in the KYOTOplus campaign, the Bloc Québécois shows Quebec's unwavering support for the fight against climate change at a time when the Conservative government is trying, by any means possible, to kill the international community's only instrument to fight this scourge.

While 163 countries meet in Thailand to discuss the post-Kyoto agenda, the Canadian government is busy digging a grave for the Kyoto protocol. It must stop digging and start acting on behalf of the environment.

The Kyoto protocol represents hope for future generations. I invite all of my colleagues to sign this petition immediately, as the Bloc Québécois members have done.

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**BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS**

**Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government's open federalism policy regarding Quebec is making life difficult for the Bloc, who admit that it is very difficult to sit in the opposition without any aspirations for power. Will the Bloc finally recognize the value in a member of Parliament being a member of the government?

For the past 25 months, the Conservative government has been getting things done and doing tangible work in the interest of Quebecers and Canadians. Issues that had been dragging on for decades have been resolved.

What justifies the Bloc's presence in Ottawa except allowing Bloc MPs to continue to contribute to their pension plans, to enjoy their salaries and benefits and ask questions without ever being able to implement anything?

The Bloc MPs do not seem to be able to agree on the Bloc's role in Ottawa: is it to make federalism work or is it a farm team for the Parti Québécois?

*Statements by Members***THE DESJARDINS GROUP**

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to highlight today the achievements of Alban D'Amours, a great manager in the field of cooperative finance. Mr. D'Amours has just completed a second four-year term at the head of the Desjardins cooperative movement.

Under his leadership, Desjardins Group has experienced eight years of sustained growth. Not only has business volume increased, but the member dividends have also increased. In addition, the movement has formed a new partnership with the Fédération des caisses populaires de l'Ontario and has signed service agreements with the Alliance des caisses populaires de l'Ontario and with numerous credit unions in other parts of the country. I could also pay great tribute to Développement international Desjardins.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the Desjardins Group for having chosen Monique Leroux as the new president and chief executive officer at its annual meeting. Ms. Leroux is the first woman president of the Desjardins Group and the first woman to lead a major financial institution in Canada.

Congratulations to Mr. D'Amours and much success to Ms. Leroux!

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[English]

**AFGHANISTAN**

**Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, over the past number of months, our Prime Minister, Minister of National Defence and Minister of Foreign Affairs have been working hard to communicate to our allies the importance and necessity of more NATO troops in southern Afghanistan.

Earlier today, our Prime Minister announced good news for the Afghanistan mission. Our NATO allies have met key conditions for keeping Canadian troops in Afghanistan. The French have committed to send more troops to eastern Afghanistan and the Americans have agreed to bolster NATO troops in the southern part of the country.

Our NATO allies heard Canada's message that more troops are needed and they responded. This signifies much needed help for our brave men and women who risk their lives daily in order to help make Afghanistan a better country. I for one am grateful for their sacrifices. Today the Prime Minister said Canada's engagement and sacrifice in Afghanistan has been widely appreciated and respected by all our NATO allies.

This is just one more example of strong leadership and real results from this Prime Minister and this Conservative government.

\* \* \*

●(1410)

**MARK ROSE**

**Hon. Bill Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that I rise today to have the House take note of the death of a friend and distinguished former colleague, the hon. Mark Rose, who died on March 8 at the age of 84.

Mark Rose sat in this House from 1968-74 and again from 1979-83, after which he served in the B.C. legislature until 1991. My first memory of him was as chairman of the NDP caucus from 1979-83, during a time when very important decisions to be made, combined with many rookies like myself and the member for Toronto Centre, made for impassioned internal debate.

His experience and perspective were greatly valued at that critical time, but Mark's greatest gift to us all down through the years was his great sense of humour and sharp wit, which he combined with a good-natured personality to be an outstanding example of the kind of parliamentary civility that we so often mourn the lack of in contemporary politics.

He was partisan but not mean. Perhaps the talented musician and music professor in him, which we also remember with great admiration, just could not contemplate playing a sour note.

To his wife, Isabel, his three daughters and extended family, we express our sincere condolences and gratitude for a life well lived in the service of the common good.

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**JANE AND FINCH COMMUNITY**

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I met recently with members of an important community group in my riding of York West.

Jane and Finch on the Move is a grassroots group of community members whose mission is to promote community solidarity and harmony as they strive toward removing barriers that many in our community face.

I applaud Jane and Finch on the Move's ongoing dedication to improving the quality of life in our riding in York West. Their initiatives can strengthen our neighbourhood and I would like to thank them for taking the time to inform me of their positive activities.

I look forward to working with Jane and Finch on the Move in the future as we continue to build a strong, healthy and successful riding of York West.

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[Translation]

**THE QUEBEC NATION**

**Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, this week the government had another opportunity to demonstrate its support for the Quebec nation but it refused to endorse the Bloc Québécois motion on French as the language of work in Quebec.

The Bloc Québécois regularly extends its hand to allow this government to make recognition of the Quebec nation more than an empty gesture. The Conservative government rejects it all, every time, and comes back with increasingly preposterous suggestions. Their latest is a big one: to link recognition of the Quebec nation to achieving a majority in the coming election. Not long ago, the adoption of a rescue plan for the manufacturing and forestry sectors was tied to approval of the budget. This atmosphere of déjà vu leaves a bad taste.

*Oral Questions*

The Bloc Québécois remains open to any action that will lead to making the Quebec nation a reality but it should not be subject to shameless blackmail.

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[English]

**FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL RELATIONS**

**Mr. Omar Alhabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Ontario is facing real economic challenges, challenges like the struggling manufacturing sector, the weak forestry industry and the rising infrastructure deficit, to name a few. Instead of offering meaningful solutions to those challenges, the Minister of Finance decided to pursue his vindictive impulses.

Ontarians are familiar with that minister's bizarre and frequent outbursts. He recently has set a new low. His vindictive pursuit is petty and void of substance. The Minister of Finance needs to realize that his old and archaic policies have failed Ontarians in the past and are failing Canadians right now.

While the minister is determined to embarrass himself, where are his Ontario colleagues? Why are they not standing up for Ontario?

This is a minister who promised to end bickering with the provinces. Instead, he is initiating it. I cannot help but be reminded of what my colleague for Markham—Unionville has always said, that the Minister of Finance is out of his depth.

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•(1415)

[Translation]

**LIBERAL PARTY**

**Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, just yesterday we saw the Liberal leader trying everything he could to censor the media that wanted to publish the list of Liberal candidates in Quebec.

Who has something to hide? When asked who authorized this injunction, the Liberal leader replied that it was not him; it was the Quebec wing of the Liberal Party.

The president of the Quebec wing, Robert Fragasso, did not hesitate to contradict him, "With all due respect to my leader, it is simply a matter of reading the action. The plaintiff is clearly the Liberal Party of Canada."

That hurts my eyes.

Who is the leader of the Liberals if no one is responsible for issuing the injunction? And since when does being publicly acknowledged as a candidate in Quebec ruin a reputation and cause irreparable damage, unless, of course, one is standing as a candidate for the Liberal Party?

I will conclude by saying that, as a Conservative, I am very happy to have a real leader.

**ORAL QUESTIONS**

[English]

**CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we cannot have a fair and just immigration system without rules, but with a stroke of the pen the minister has written fairness and justice out of the immigration system.

Changing one word "shall" to "may" in the regulations means that immigrants who meet all the requirements may find Canada slamming the door in their face. What a difference one word can make in regulations.

Will the minister admit that with this change she has moved our immigration system out of the realm of justice and into the universe of arbitrary power?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, absolutely not, although I do see today that the Liberal leader is again in full retreat. He has abandoned his court injunction to keep the names of Liberal candidates secret. Apparently somebody over there finally figured out that having candidates swear affidavits saying that they would be irreparably harmed if they were publicly known in Quebec as Liberals would hurt their reputations and that would be irreparable harm. While that may be true, it might be unwise politically.

As for their concerns about the immigration bill, I expect that when it comes time for a vote they will be engaging in a similar kind of retreat.

[Translation]

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, for 27 months this government has done nothing to solve the immigration problem. During that time 100,000 new people filed applications. And then, after 27 months of doing nothing, it comes up with a solution: the minister herself will choose the immigrants she prefers.

When will she admit that arbitrary decisions will never solve the immigration problem?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, that is not true. The Conservative government has an impressive track record.

Our government has cut the landing fees a new immigrant has to pay in half. We have allocated new funding totalling \$1.4 billion for newcomer settlement services. We have created the Foreign Credentials Referral Office as part of the foreign credentials recognition program.

We have also offered an official apology to the Chinese community for the head tax that Chinese immigrants were required to pay, a tax that was discriminatory. That track record—

**The Speaker:** The member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore has the floor.



*Oral Questions**[English]*

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I wonder what the House leader has against his own Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration is not fixing our immigration system. She is just concentrating power in her own hands. The policy will take away an applicant's opportunity to appeal. The policy will legalize cherry-picking, allowing the minister to choose immigrants with unfettered and final discretion. This is not the Canadian way.

Will the minister admit that what she is really trying to do is give arbitrary discretion the force of law?

• (1420)

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is no such thing. The minister has actually performed quite impressively since she became minister. As a result, last year we saw the highest level of immigration ever in Canadian history, well not ever, in the past 100 years or so. We have seen family reunification wait times reduced by as much as 40%.

It is a difficult job she has to do cleaning up the track record of the previous government. Does the member know how I know that? I know that because nobody less than the deputy leader of the Liberal Party said the following, "...but I think I have to admit...that we didn't get it done on immigration". That is that member of Parliament who was speaking.

*[Translation]*

**Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the president of the Quebec Immigration Lawyers Association, Joseph Allen, says that there are other ways of dealing with a backlog besides giving discretion powers to the monarch, and that this amounts to giving the minister extremely broad discretion without in any way defining how far that discretion extends.

What does the minister think about the concerns raised by Mr. Allen? Why are there no limits on the discretion she is trying to give herself?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should read the facts. In reality, the minister would have the power to determine how many people in a class may apply to enter Canada in a year. This affects only one class, and not all individuals, as she would like you to believe.

*[English]*

The Canadian Bar Association said:

...it's the start of creating a fairer system, because the government will be more forthcoming about what types of immigrants the country needs instead of giving people false hopes.

*[Translation]*

**Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, when the minister exercises her arbitrary power to limit the number of applications that will be considered, that will limit Quebec's choices.

How could she guarantee that these orders will be compatible with the objectives of Quebec and those of the rest of the country?

How can she say that reducing the number of applications she will accept will not reduce the latitude Quebec has in respect of immigration?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I already assured this House last week that we were in discussions with the representatives of Quebec. We have assured them that there would be no repercussions for the Canada-Quebec immigration accord.

That will continue as it is now. We are going to abide by that agreement, despite the Liberals' efforts.

\* \* \*

**THE QUEBEC NATION**

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the government says that it recognizes the Quebec nation. In Quebec, the official language is French, and the language of work is French. However, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages did not even tell us that bilingualism takes precedence in federal institutions and companies governed by the Canada Labour Code, such as banks and telecommunications companies.

My question for the Minister of Labour, who does not think the fruit is ripe, is this: Does he realize that what he is proposing to Quebec workers who fall under the Canada Labour Code is bilingualism?

**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 point out that the Canada Labour Code does not cover language of work any more than the Quebec Labour Code or any other province's labour code. The Canada Labour Code covers health and safety in the workplace, labour relations and labour standards.

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the Minister of Labour that Bill 101 applies throughout Quebec and that the federal Official Languages Act applies across Canada.

We are asking the minister to make an exception for Quebec with respect to language of work. If an exception is not made, then Canadian bilingualism legislation applies, and that is not what Quebec wants. Quebec wants the language of work in the province to be French, regardless of whether workers are governed by the Canada Labour Code or the Quebec Labour Code. I think that is easy enough to understand.

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my department is one of the large organizations that falls under federal jurisdiction. Whether they ship merchandise by train, by air or by boat, or provide telecommunications services, large corporations often have head offices in different provinces. As a result, their employees sometimes have to work in the other official language when the need arises.

In Quebec, some people speak English and need services in English, while others speak French and need services in French. We provide services to meet those needs.

*Oral Questions*

●(1425)

**FISCAL IMBALANCE**

**Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives refuse to take action with regard to the concrete recognition of the Quebec nation. Furthermore, they are incapable of keeping their own promise with regard to the fiscal imbalance. The government has announced on several occasions that it will table a bill to limit its spending power in provincial jurisdictions. It has yet to materialize.

When does the minister intend to table his bill and thus keep the promise made by the Prime Minister to Quebec in December 2005?

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

[English]

The fiscal imbalance issue was dealt with in 2006-07. I am pleased that we have arrived at fiscal balance in Canada between the Government of Canada and the other governments, not without substantial increases in the transfer payments for the provinces and territories which have taken place.

The witness to this now is that when the provincial premiers and territorial leaders get together the one subject they do not talk about is the former fiscal imbalance which is now fiscal balance in Canada.

[Translation]

**Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I will try again.

To limit the federal spending power in Quebec's jurisdictions, the government need only table a bill which provides Quebec with the right to opt out—with no strings attached and with full financial compensation—from any new or existing federal program, whether cost-shared or not, which interferes in its areas of jurisdiction.

Does the government intend to meet Quebec's expectations and finally table a bill as promised by the Prime Minister?

[English]

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there are lots of instances where the Government of Quebec receives compensation.

Just yesterday, I think it was, the hon. member raised the question of the GST and Quebec's involvement in that.

In fact, Quebec administers its own tax, as well as the GST on behalf of the federal government, for which the federal government paid Quebec approximately \$130 million in 2006-07.

\* \* \*

**CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives talk about reducing the backlog of immigrants who have applied to come to Canada but the fact is that the Conservative government simply cannot be trusted.

The changes that are proposed here would do irreversible damage to family reunification. It would hurt families in a way that cannot be undone later. One of the changes would actually give the minister the

sole decision making power to shape Canadian society and to make those decisions arbitrarily, behind closed doors.

We hear laughing from the benches. This is a serious matter and the NDP will do everything to stop this unfair practice. Will the government separate it from the—

**The Speaker:** The hon. government House leader.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the NDP leader mischaracterizes entirely what is being done. He obviously was not listening earlier.

When it comes to family reunification, we have taken action already and, as a result, wait times for family reunification have been reduced by as much as 40%. That is a commitment for results that we are delivering on. We are solving a problem created by that party over there and that party will never get a chance to do it.

The reason we are bringing in these changes is that we need an immigration system that works for immigrants, that works for the Canadian economy and that allows us to get the skilled help that this country and this economy needs to be as prosperous and successful for—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas.

\* \* \*

**HUMAN RIGHTS**

**Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, a video tape from a party some years ago was released today in Regina that includes Saskatchewan Premier Wall, former Senator Bernston and the current Conservative member for Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre who allegedly states on the tape, “Let me put it to you this way: There are As and Bs. The As are guys like me. The Bs are homosexual faggots with dirt under their fingernails who transmit diseases”.

Will the government ensure that the member makes an immediate, unequivocal apology to all members of the gay community and all Canadians for these ill-informed, hurtful and unconscionable remarks? Will it take all appropriate action?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am unfamiliar with the 16 or 17 year old video to which the hon. member has just referred. The comments do sound distressing and inappropriate and they will have due attention.

\* \* \*

●(1430)

**CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, when the current chair of the justice committee was the Reform Party's immigration critic, he said “there is a cost to be incurred by admitting tens of thousands of illiterate immigrants”. He then called them “a drain upon our social services who will lower the average skill of our workforce”.

*Oral Questions*

Why is the government trying to sneak its empty immigration hidden agenda in through a budget bill? Is it trying to do today what it could not do as the Reform Party?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I really do not understand how the hon. member opposite can think that we are trying to sneak anything through when all day this issue is being debated in the House.

It will go through committee where it will get full discussion. The hon. member is welcome to participate in that discussion if her colleagues will let her.

Quite frankly, we are looking for an open, honest discussion on this but we need to do it quickly. Immigrants and industry cannot afford to wait while the opposition parties delay another bill, as they did our violent crime bills. We need to get this done and we need to get it done now.

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is the minister who does not understand immigration policy. The government sees immigrants as a liability and refugees as a security threat.

In their 2004 platform, the Conservatives put refugee issues under the heading, "Demand better security". Why is the minister perpetuating this anti-immigrant stereotype with her latest power grab?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the real question is, why, once again, are the Liberals deliberately misrepresenting the facts to immigrants? Why are they the ones who are fearing and smearing when they cannot deal with policies? Because they have none.

I will quote from the *Globe and Mail*. It states:

—the Tories surely anticipated how their opponents would misrepresent their policies. That they are pressing on regardless shows a strong commitment to this country's interests.

We are getting the job done.

**Hon. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the chair of the justice committee is the same person who, while immigration critic, blamed newcomers in Toronto for increasing crime rates. He said, "Do you notice that in Toronto there has been increased crime from certain groups, like Jamaicans?"

Is it not true that the Conservative opinion of immigrants has not changed in 20 years and that their proposed immigration reforms prove it?

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I find very curious these questions coming from members of a party whose predecessors introduced the Asian Exclusion Act, the continuous journey policy, the internment of Japanese Canadians, not to mention the War Measures Act.

The party that preceded the last Conservative government tripled Canada's immigration numbers to the highest ever in the late 1980s and early 1990s, levels which we have maintained. This government is delighted that since coming to office, we have welcomed nearly a million new people to Canada's borders.

**Hon. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, telling immigrants that they need not apply is not the solution to our immigration challenges.

When will the government admit it wants to change the rules so it can hand-pick which immigrants get into Canada? Why is it sneaking these reforms in through a budget bill, instead of allowing the House to have an independent debate on this critical issue?

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is sneaking in a bill for full debate in full public light. What we are trying to do is fix the problem that the Liberals created through their wilful neglect.

That member should tell us why he voted to impose a \$1,000 head tax on all newcomers to our country. He should tell us why he voted to cut immigrant settlement funding by hundreds of millions of dollars. He should tell us why he opposed an apology for the Chinese head tax. He should tell us why he is opposed to our efforts to finally do something about foreign credential recognition.

\* \* \*

● (1435)

[*Translation*]

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservative environmental plan benefits the economy of western Canada at the expense of the Quebec economy. Opting for intensity-based GHG emission targets rather than absolute targets and choosing 2006 as the reference year instead of 1990 clearly demonstrate that the Conservatives have gone for the polluter-paid approach, because it will give oil companies that reduce the intensity of their emissions credits, but will give no credits for companies in Quebec that have already made efforts.

Will the Minister confirm that his environmental plan is expressly designed for the oil companies in western Canada?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, that is not the case at all. Everything my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie has said is false. Canada is taking action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We have a real plan to slow the increase in these emissions in all 10 provinces of Canada. For the first time in the history of Canada, the Montreal stock exchange has said that it is ready to open a carbon market. We are taking action.

**Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the case of the aluminum industry in Quebec clearly illustrates this injustice. From 1990 to 2005, it reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by 13%. The Conservative plan wipes those efforts off the slate, because it counts only reductions made since 2006.

*Oral Questions*

Will the Minister of the Environment recognize, as Christian Van Houtte of the aluminum producers' association has done, that his plan penalizes companies that are already on the cutting edge of the technology and reward the ones that have made no effort?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our plan to regulate emissions gives credit for action that has already been taken. We are working closely with Alcan to make sure that its efforts are recognized in our regulations.

For the first time in the history of Canada, we have a real plan to reduce greenhouse gases. We are taking action and we are doing real work. In the 18 years since the Bloc first came here to the House of Commons, absolutely nothing has been done. We are taking action, and we are getting real results.

\* \* \*

**FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, Mohamed Kohail, the young Quebecker sentenced to death by decapitation in Saudi Arabia, was not given a real opportunity to appeal. His lawyer was threatened by judges and thrown out of the court room. The 23-year-old Kohail and his 17-year-old brother Sultan were placed in detention in January. Sultan could face the same sentence on Saturday.

What is the government waiting for to call in the Saudi Arabian Ambassador and demand that these two young Quebeckers be returned to Canada?

[*English*]

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in all these cases the Government of Canada is providing consular services.

In the case of Ms. Morin, we have been in contact with her since 2003. Consular services have been provided.

In the case of Mr. Kohail, the ambassador met with his lawyers. We are working with his family and the lawyers to ensure that his rights are protected over there.

We will be doing everything we can to help these individuals.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am very eager to hear the response to this question.

In yet another case, a young Quebecker, Nathalie Morin, age 23, is appealing to the government to help her get out of Saudi Arabia, where she and her two young boys are being held against her will, by her husband.

Does the federal government intend to demand that the Saudi ambassador to Canada intervene to allow this young woman to return home with her children?

[*English*]

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I just said, we are aware of this case. Consular officials have provided assistance and support to Ms. Morin and her family on numerous occasions since 2003.

Consular officials in Riyadh are currently working closely with relevant Saudi authorities to attempt to find a resolution to Ms. Morin's case.

\* \* \*

● (1440)

**SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

**Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on October 25, the industry minister made a major announcement on RADARSAT-2 where he boasted, "This satellite will help us vigorously protect our Arctic sovereignty". The minister would not have said those words if MDA had told him that it was already in deep negotiations to sell the same satellite to the Americans.

How can the minister trust MDA and ATK's assurances today when they were hiding the truth from him last fall?

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend knows full well that under the Investment Canada Act the review, for which I am responsible, requires the determination of net benefits to Canada. That will depend upon the discussions with the proponent. This analysis is currently under review. I cannot speak further about it, and my friend knows that. He knows full well the confidentiality requirements of the statute.

**Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on December 14, the day the satellite was launched, the minister repeated, "This satellite will help us vigorously protect our Arctic sovereignty". The very next business day MDA agreed to sell the satellite to the Americans.

Could the minister name one other country in the world that would invest \$445 million to launch a satellite to protect its sovereignty and would then allow that same satellite to be sold to foreigners the very next day?

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my friend knows full well that initially under the Investment Canada Act the review needs to take place. I have extended the 30 day period for the review as of March 20.

In addition, as the Minister of Industry responsible for the Canadian Space Agency, I am responsible for the administration of the contracts between MDA and the Canadian Space Agency. I will ensure that the taxpayers of Canada receive exactly what they are entitled to receive.

**Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the space industry provides high paying, high value added jobs across the country, the sort of jobs we should be fighting tooth and nail to keep in Canada. We know the American security regulations make it difficult for foreign companies to sell to NASA, yet some countries are able to have those requirements waived.

Why is the government not standing up for Canadian jobs and securing access for our businesses? Why is the government telling our industry that for it to succeed, it must trade in its passport and move to the south?

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my friend speaks, I think, of the ITAR. He knows full well that there are discussions about those. I can assure him that in the context of discussions, for example, with respect to the SPP, those kinds of issues are brought to the table and discussed.

*Oral Questions*

We continue to work with our American neighbours to ensure we have a vibrant space industry and a vibrant aeronautics industry and that we are able to make these arrangements workable.

**Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am glad the minister mentioned the SPP because this issue is very important. It is not only about our jobs; it is about our sovereignty.

On February 6, the American buyer ATK had this to say about RADARSAT-2, “the key for us is to be able to move that technology, transfer that technology into the ATK U.S. space”. Canadians have invested \$445 million to develop this technology. Now the Conservatives are giving it away.

We all remember all too well it was a Conservative government that sold out Canada's aerospace industry when it scrapped the Avro Arrow. Will the Conservative government repeat that same mistake and sell us out again?

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will not comment on the specifics of the case that are before me under the Investment Canada Act. If my friend really believes that is the effect of the contracts between the Canadian Space Agency and MDA, I would invite him to boldly go where no Liberal has gone before, talk to the people who negotiated that contract, whom he sits with on that side of the House.

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**SEALING INDUSTRY**

**Mr. Fabian Manning (Avalon, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the seal hunt is an important part of the economy and cultural heritage in Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, the Maritimes and, indeed, all of Canada. Our government has shown leadership in defending and promoting the hunt on the international stage.

Here at home there have been reports that the vessel the *Farley Mowat*, which is owned by the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, has endangered the lives of sealers on the ice.

Will the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans please advise the House and the people involved in this important industry what action our government will be taking to address these concerns?

• (1445)

**Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canada has a sustainable, well-managed seal hunt. We will not tolerate the reckless antics of the Sea Shepherd Society.

However, I wonder if the Leader of the Opposition feels the same way. His co-leader, Elizabeth May, is listed as a member of the advisory board of the Sea Shepherd Society. Does he think sealers are vicious killers? Has the leader called her to ask her to advise the Sea Shepherd Society to back off?

We will protect our sealers. We will pursue charges.

\* \* \*

**SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, for weeks now I have been trying to get an answer from the Minister of Foreign Affairs regarding his responsibility under the Remote Sensing Space Systems Act. The act requires him to make a decision regarding the

licence of RADARSAT-2, based on Canada's national interest and the defence of Canada.

I will try again. Will the Minister of Foreign Affairs please stand and let us know if he is aware of his responsibility for the licence of RADARSAT-2?

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I think it is clear to members of the House that when we are dealing with members of the NDP, not only is their remote sensing defective, their up close sensing does not work either. We dealt with this yesterday.

Clearly, on March 20, MDA Geospatial submitted to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, as it was required to do, a request for licence transfer. That cannot be dealt with until such time as I have dealt with, under the Investment Canada Act, the initial application.

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, surely the minister, or someone over there, understands the importance of RADARSAT-2 to our sovereignty. This was a technology bought by Canadians, made by Canadians. This is our lens on our territory.

How will the government monitor the north when it gives away the satellite by Google Earth? Is that its plan? We want to know what the government's commitment is to keep our technology here. We want the foreign affairs minister to please stand, take action now and quit hiding.

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, once again, the Minister of Foreign Affairs has responsibilities under that legislation. That is not invoked until such time as the Investment Canada application is dealt with. I will deal with that application. I will deal with it in due course, and I will deal with it according to the full responsibility under the Investment Canada Act.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**CANADIAN HERITAGE**

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the new blacklist minister gave a pitiful performance yesterday in the other place, confirming the audiovisual industry's fears about the Conservatives' real intentions when it comes to censoring future productions. Not only did her deputy minister confirm that there are already regulations in place whereby tax credits could be refused, but she was unable to explain the reason for her power trip, why she insisted on having the power to censure.

What film would she have liked to blacklist: *Borderline*, *Juno*, *Eastern Promises* or *Porky's*?

**Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. Our government does not intend to engage in censorship. On the contrary, the government supports freedom of expression.

### Oral Questions

As I explained yesterday and as my deputy minister confirmed, in contrast to what the member for Bourassa is saying, at present, because of a legislative gap that has existed since 2005, if a producer were prosecuted under the Criminal Code, I would have no way of preventing that producer from receiving public money.

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in any event, the Liberals are against censorship.

Rocked by criticism, our new national censor awkwardly suggested a so-called compromise yesterday and asked the industry to come up with guidelines, when she knows that guidelines have no legal force. A guideline can be changed at any time, without the consent of Parliament.

If the minister really wants to work with the industry, why does she not just agree to get rid of her government's trick and become the Minister of Canadian Heritage for once, rather than the minister of censorship?

**Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member for Bourassa can grandstand all he likes, but he knows that the wording of the clause in Bill C-10 is exactly the same as what his former colleagues, ministers Manley and Copps, included in a press release in 2003.

It is exactly the same thing, but five years later, suddenly the Liberals are asking questions.

\* \* \*

• (1450)

[English]

### ETHICS

**Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, “opposition parties reflect the views of two-thirds of Canadians, and the government must take them into account in order to make a minority Parliament work”. Who said that? It was the Prime Minister when he sat in opposition in 2004. He also said that the opposition has “a majority on parliamentary committees” and the “government will have no choice but to listen” to them.

Why does the government no longer believe in democracy when it comes to the Prime Minister appearing before a committee to explain that tape on which he says that “financial considerations” were offered to Chuck Cadman?

**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):** Again, Mr. Speaker, we have been clear and consistent on this issue from the very beginning. The Liberals can keep trying to advance it and try to keep throwing mud at members of Parliament and at the Prime Minister, but their accusations are false and they are proven to be so every day.

\* \* \*

### HUMAN RIGHTS

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am sure all members are shocked by what appear to be racist, sexist and homophobic remarks attributed to the Conservative member for Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre. The previous Conservative mem-

ber for this same riding, Mr. Spencer, was dumped by his party for similarly offensive attitudes.

Will the government House leader require the member to step aside today from his duties as parliamentary secretary until this matter can be properly investigated and resolved?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, we have not seen this 16 or 17 year old videotape, which I gather was released while we have been here in the House. It will, however, receive due attention.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

### JUSTICE

**Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park published a letter in Wednesday's edition of the *National Post* in which he stated that his bill will ensure that unborn children will have the same protection as other human beings under criminal law.

Can the Minister of Justice, who voted for this bill, explain this new legal concept of the unborn child?

[English]

**Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member is referring to a private member's bill that is now before the committee. I urge the committee to have a look at that bill and make its recommendations to Parliament.

With respect to the government, the government has no plans to introduce legislation in that area.

[Translation]

**Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Status of Women passed a Bloc Québécois motion advising the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights of its unequivocal opposition to Bill C-484, which undermines a woman's right to abortion.

Will the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages agree to take over where the committee left off and also approach the Minister of Justice, or will she abandon women once again?

[English]

**Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is welcome to make any representations before the committee that is having a look at that private member's bill, but as I indicated, the government has no plans to introduce legislation in that area.

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### TOBACCO INDUSTRY

**Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on February 7 in committee I asked the Minister of Agriculture what he was willing to do to help tobacco farmers. He claimed that he was moving on the file and that I and others should “stay tuned”. He repeated this answer in the House on February 14.

*Oral Questions*

Quite to the contrary, the minister has provided nothing for tobacco farmers, who are in very desperate straits. Why did the minister say he would take action sooner rather than later if he actually intended to do nothing whatsoever?

**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, our minister is doing a lot. Our minister had some very frank conversations with the tobacco industry. This week, as a matter of fact, he met with the Ontario agriculture minister, Ms. Leona Dombrowsky. He has also met with the manufacturers and growers, he has had discussions, and they are willing to continue.

What we are trying to say is that he made a commitment that he is willing to continue to work with those members. He has also put in the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London as chair of a task force of local municipal leaders to find existing programs to help access that assistance.

\* \* \*

●(1455)

**AFGHANISTAN**

**Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Afghanistan motion recently passed by this House outlined our assessment that NATO needs to provide more troops in southern Afghanistan. Our Prime Minister, our Minister of National Defence and our Minister of Foreign Affairs have been working hard at pressing this point with our allies.

Yesterday we heard important news coming out of the summit. The French have committed to send more troops to eastern Afghanistan and the Americans have agreed to bolster our troops in the south. Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence tell us what this means for Canada and for NATO?

**Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his strong support of the Canadian Forces. We are very pleased that our American and French allies have stepped up. Canada made the request to NATO. Our allies listened to us and have responded. It is a tribute to the leadership of the Prime Minister, the Minister of National Defence and the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The House recently passed a motion calling for this kind of support from NATO. That support has now been delivered. That check is in the box. There are a couple of other requirements that we are looking for. We are making great progress in that area. We will get that job done as well, as we always do.

\* \* \*

**GASOLINE PRICES**

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, gas prices in Canada are on the rise again. As working families were taking their children to school this morning, gas stations across this country were jacking up prices at the pump. They cannot blame it on hurricane Katrina any more. This time it is speculators and profiteers fuelled by pure greed.

The Competition Bureau has proven useless on this file and has not protected Canadians. Canadians need a real solution: an oil and

gas monitoring and regulatory system. Why will this Conservative government not get the job done?

**Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are getting the job done. We understand the burden that high gas prices put on Canadian families and the cost of living for everyone. We have taken direct steps to help to reduce those gas prices and the cost of living with significant changes, particularly tax reductions, including cuts to the GST. We are focused on energy efficiency and we are getting the job done for Canadians.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of the Environment.

The Bas-Caraquet weather station in New Brunswick provides an essential service to residents and fishers. It helps to keep them safe. There are rumours that the government plans to close the station. I wrote two letters to the Minister of the Environment, one in October and another in February, asking him what he planned to do, and he never replied.

Does the minister intend to close the Bas-Caraquet weather station or not? If not, will he provide the money to update it?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

After receiving his letter, I uncovered secret cuts made by the previous government. The former Minister of the Environment, who is now the Liberal Party leader, is the one who made those cuts.

I would like to tell the House that the government does not intend to close the Bas-Caraquet weather station, and that I would be pleased to work with my colleague to find the funds needed for this important file.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

**TOURISM INDUSTRY**

**Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, last week I met with the stakeholders of the tourism industry and they are upset with the government.

The Minister of Transport is not allowing air access to Canadian airports. The Minister of Human Resources and Social Development is not helping with staff shortages. The Minister of National Revenue has taken away the individual GST rebate and has denied adequate customs services. The Minister of Industry has cut promotion. Finally, the Minister of Foreign Affairs has failed to get approved destination status for China.

Hello? Does anybody over there care about the tourism industry?

*Business of the House*

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this government cares about the tourism industry. If we want to find a former Canadian government that did not care about the tourism industry, it sits on that side of the House. It did absolutely nothing to advance the interests of Canadian tourism.

This minister is dealing with the issue. The former Liberal government did not do anything.

\* \* \*

**HOUSING**

**Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development. Given the fact that the human resources and social development committee is about to embark on a very important study of poverty in Canada, and in light of recent meetings with the minister's provincial housing counterparts yesterday, can the minister tell us what this government is doing to help Canadians struggling in poverty with regard to affordable and social housing in Canada?

• (1500)

**Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the member's leadership as the chair of the human resources committee. He does an outstanding job.

Last night I was pleased to have very warm and constructive meetings with my provincial and territorial colleagues. We agreed to work together on these important issues. I was very pleased to point out to them that we are now providing more resources for the building of homes for vulnerable Canadians than any government in history. They were very pleased to learn that.

\* \* \*

**GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS**

**Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, Ind.):** Mr. Speaker, when the Minister of Public Works called for bids on the Victoria class in-service support contract, the department apparently accepted the most expensive proposal. When I applied through access to information to confirm this, I was sent a really nice chart, but all the numbers on it are blanked out.

Therefore, would the minister confirm that the bid chosen was the most expensive, highest priced tender, and would he now table the complete chart with the numbers so we can all see what the tenders were?

**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, I know that my colleague is very interested in this file, and rightfully so, in that it is an important one, but his comments on this in public have been entirely premature. This issue is in fact before the courts. No final decision has been made. I would be glad to work with my colleague to get him whatever information he is looking for.

I know that all members of the House from all parties welcome him back to the House and wish him a full recovery. It is great to see him back in the House.

**PRESENCE IN GALLERY**

**The Speaker:** I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Honourable Jerome Kennedy, Minister of Justice and Attorney General for Newfoundland and Labrador.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

\* \* \*

**BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on the business of the House for the coming week, I wonder if the government House leader could provide the agenda that he has in mind beyond the budget bill, which of course is preoccupying the House now. I would also like to ask him two specific questions.

First, Bill C-21, dealing with aboriginal human rights, has been dealt with extensively in a committee of the House of Commons and has been reported back to the House. It has been sitting on the order paper ready to be dealt with by the House since the 30th of January. I wonder if he could tell us when he intends to call Bill C-21 to be finally dealt with in the House.

Second, it was three weeks ago today that this House adopted a motion pertaining to the mission in Afghanistan. That motion calls explicitly for the creation of a special standing committee to provide greater transparency and accountability with respect to that mission in Afghanistan. It is important that that committee be struck immediately. I wonder if the government House leader could indicate his intention with respect to the establishment of the committee on the Afghanistan mission.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by thanking the opposition House leader for performing his basic parliamentary duty by asking the Thursday question. We have missed it once or twice. I believe it is important that this government have the opportunity to inform the House of its legislative agenda for the coming week.

[Translation]

Today we have started to debate the budget implementation bill. It incorporates the measures that were announced in budget 2008 and adopted by this House on two different occasions.

• (1505)

[English]

These are prudent, focused, responsible measures, including the tax-free savings account, \$350 million for the Canada student grant program, and more money for police officers, the environment, health, and infrastructure for our cities.

We will continue to debate the bill tomorrow as well as throughout next week. The government has read reports that the opposition is going to delay and obstruct the passage of the bill. I hope that does not happen.



Next week will be improving the health and safety of Canadians week. A number of measures will be announced to accomplish this goal.

[*Translation*]

I cannot provide any details on these exact measures, but I am sure hon. members will agree that these are excellent initiatives that will improve the health and safety of Canadians.

[*English*]

Next week we will also debate changes to the Judges Act, Bill C-31; the Senate amendments to Bill C-13, our legislation to amend the Criminal Code in relation to criminal procedure, language of the accused, sentencing and other matters; and Bill C-23, which amends the Canada Marine Act.

[*Translation*]

The government will also debate—and pass, we hope—important bills to enhance the economy and accountability. There will be Bill C-33 to regulate a renewable content of 5% in gasoline by 2010, and a 2% requirement for renewable content in diesel fuel and heating oil by 2012.

We will also debate Bill C-5, which deals with responsibility in the event of a nuclear incident, Bill C-7, which amends the Aeronautics Act, and Bill C-29, to create a standard process for dealing with loans made to political parties, candidates and associations.

[*English*]

I would like to indicate that next Tuesday will be an allotted day.

In terms of the question on creating a committee of the House regarding Afghanistan, I thank the member for his question. We did receive a letter from him asking about that yesterday. We appreciate the support of this House of Commons for the motion, which has allowed the Prime Minister to travel to Bucharest and obtain the commitments that have been obtained from our NATO allies and allow that mission to continue.

We do believe it is important for that committee to be formed so it can operate shortly, and we will be proceeding with that soon.

**Hon. Ralph Goodale:** Mr. Speaker, the latter item is very important. In light of the time that has passed by, three weeks, and the NATO meetings are now essentially concluded, could the government House leader give us the assurance that the striking of that committee will take place no later than next week?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** Mr. Speaker, I know that the opposition House leader is familiar with some of the challenges we have had at committee. One of the committees that is challenged right now, because of some of the procedural wrangling, is the procedure and House affairs committee, so at this point in time I am not sure I can give him that commitment.

We hope that those kinds of issues can be resolved and we can move smoothly with these matters, as we have in the past.

**Hon. Ralph Goodale:** Mr. Speaker, as the government House leader knows, this matter does not have to be dealt with by the procedure and House affairs committee. It can in fact be dealt with

### *Privilege*

directly by the House of Commons itself. It is very important that this committee be established.

**Hon. Jay Hill:** What's the point of having another committee where you guys are operating?

**Hon. Ralph Goodale:** Mr. Speaker, the opposition whip is heckling on the subject. I will resist the temptation now to respond to him because I want to stay on the substance of the issue.

The Afghan mission is important. It is possible to have this committee up and running next week. I would ask the government House leader to see that that happens in the public interest of transparency and accountability.

**The Speaker:** Order. The Chair has notice of a couple of points of order.

[*Translation*]

We will first hear the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

\* \* \*

### PRIVILEGE

#### ORAL QUESTIONS

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, on March 13, 2008, I rose in this House on a question of privilege concerning the fact that the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages had misled the House.

This week, on April 1, the minister said:

Mr. Speaker, on March 13, 2008, the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst rose on a question of privilege regarding the invitation I received to appear before the Standing Committee on Official Languages. I responded as follows and I quote:

Appearing before the committee is a ministerial responsibility. Since being appointed, I have had the privilege of appearing before the committee on several occasions, most recently on December 6, 2007. I will be pleased to appear before the committee to discuss the next phase of the action plan as soon as I have finished working on it.

Thus, it was an unfortunate misunderstanding and I will indeed be pleased to appear before the committee when the action plan is presented.

The invitation was extended to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages because the Standing Committee on Official Languages was studying the action plan. I think that the minister neglected to read the first page and the last paragraph of the letter she sent the chair of the Standing Committee on Official Languages on February 25, which reads as follows:

It would be premature for me to appear before the committee concerning the follow-up to the action plan before I have even had an opportunity to read Mr. Lord's final report. I will not be able to provide you with any further information for your study, because we are still working on the plan. I must therefore respectfully decline the committee's invitation.

This is where she misled the House.

I do not want to take up any more of the House's time, but I do want to set the record straight. I have a recommendation to make if you should recognize that the minister misled the House, because I am talking about the House, not the Standing Committee on Official Languages. She told the committee that she would not be coming. She declined the invitation and refused to appear, but she told the House of Commons that she had not refused, that she had appeared in December and that she would be appearing once the action plan had been completed.

*Government Orders*

That was not the issue. We wanted her to appear before the committee while it was studying the action plan. She declined that invitation. With respect, we just want her to say that to the House of Commons and not to mislead the House.

If she refuses, I would like the matter to be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for review.

• (1510)

[English]

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, there was a concern the Minister of Canadian Heritage had in her answer indicating she was prepared to appear before the committee, and in some way there was a misunderstanding among the other members about when she was prepared to make that appearance. I believe that with the letter that was tabled with this House some weeks ago and with her comments here on Tuesday, she certainly clarified that.

The hon. NDP whip may not be pleased with her indication that she is going to appear after the second phase of work is completed. However, that is what she said and I believe that her explanation adequately clarified her answer that was left unclear in the House, at least in the minds of some.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Mr. Speaker, I do not want to engage in a debate on this matter. I have the minister's letter, which says, "I must therefore respectfully decline the committee's invitation."

Mr. Speaker, I would like you to rule on this matter in this House.

**The Speaker:** I appreciate all the points made by hon. members on this matter. I have heard enough. I will consider everything I have heard and come back to the House soon with a decision.

The hon. member for Louis-Hébert on a point of order.

\* \* \*

**POINT OF ORDER**

## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

**Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, during the statement by the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, a Bloc Québécois member, the hon. member for Montcalm, used unparliamentary language, as usual. He does this quite often. We do not usually bring it up, but today he went too far.

I would like the hon. member for Montcalm to withdraw the remarks he made during the statement by the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

**Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, since the hon. member is not here we will take note of what the hon. member for Louis-Hébert has just said and we will ensure that this behaviour is rectified.

[English]

## ORAL QUESTIONS

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, during oral questions, sometimes members have a tendency to get a little carried away with some of their comments. I would like to think

that is what happened with the member for Don Valley East when she asked her question today. She said, and I quote, that the government views immigrants as a liability. I found that particularly hurtful. I would like to ask the member for Don Valley East to withdraw the comment and apologize for making it.

I may have been born in Peterborough, but I am the grandson of an immigrant family. Our entire caucus is enriched by members who come from a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds, as well as religious backgrounds. We value each and every one of them. I found that comment to be particularly hurtful. In the name of my grandparents who have departed, I cannot possibly let that stand without requesting an apology.

• (1515)

**The Speaker:** I am sure the hon. member for Don Valley East will have a look at the submission of the hon. member for Peterborough and we will hear her in due course.

**GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[English]

**BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2008**

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-50, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 26, 2008 and to enact provisions to preserve the fiscal plan set out in that budget, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, things have quietened down a bit now and I am happy to participate and offer my comments on Bill C-50, the budget implementation bill.

Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East.

Imitation is often mentioned as the highest form of flattery, so Canadians are now experiencing a strange sense of déjà vu with the minority Conservative government's 2008 budget.

It seems that the Conservatives lack any ideas of their own and instead have decided to present a watered down version of our Liberal policies.

Perhaps if the finance minister was not so busy bashing his home province and my home province of Ontario, he would have had more time to come up with more original policies, some of his own policies, rather than recycling ours and trying to pass them off as new policies.

*Government Orders*

Some of the many excellent Liberal initiatives that the finance minister repackaged are: making the gas tax transfer permanent, as we had committed to 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 called for in February 2008; providing funding to hire more police, as we committed to in March 2007; reversing some of the Conservatives previous cuts to university granting councils and the indirect costs of research programs, which would have grown substantially under the Liberal economic update of 2005; replacing some of the funding from the Liberal 2005 update for student grants; and modernizing the Canada student loans program.

That is quite a list of Liberal accomplishments. I could go on further with more Liberal achievements and more of our exceptional policies, but I will go back to minority Conservative government's budget implementation bill.

I am glad the Conservatives really and truly appreciated those policies and those ideas that we had and went forward to implement them because they could see they were very good policies as well.

I certainly would have preferred it if the Conservatives had not already spent the cupboard bare with their previous budgets and fall economic and fiscal updates, leaving a razor thin surplus to protect Canada's economy should it continue to falter.

The next six months will be very important in Canada's economy and we can only hope that Canada will come through this without finding ourselves back in a deficit position again.

All the Conservatives are looking for is a boost in their poll numbers, continuing to demonstrate to Canadians what their priorities are. By focusing on the election that it is so desperate for, the government has again showed its incredible shortsightedness and total lack of ability to build our great nation.

Everything is built on polls and more polls. There is no planning for next week because everything is being done on the fly. The Conservatives have wasted a major opportunity to address Canada's infrastructure deficit by not acting on the Liberal proposal to use \$7 billion of this year's debt paydown to fund infrastructure projects across the country. The investment of that \$7 billion in infrastructure across Canada could clearly have protected us against what many of us fear is a possible recession here in Canada.

Nevertheless, we did not vote against this budget as there was nothing in the budget that warrants an election that Canadians clearly do not want, particularly at such a difficult time for the Canadian economy.

People that I speak to tell us to be patient and give it more time and that they are watching what everybody is doing. Clearly the polls are showing that because frankly nobody is going up and nobody is going down.

However, now that the minority Conservative government has very sneakily slipped legislative changes to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act into the budget implementation bill, it really gives us cause for concern.

These changes would give the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration unilateral authority to determine priorities for the

processing of immigration application requests. These measures could potentially reduce the number of new immigration applications that the federal government accepts each year, particularly in the number of family class applications.

• (1520)

All of us need to be concerned about family reunification, as well as the whole issue of filling the needs through our skilled trades and economic requirements.

We have never seen any compassion from the government and I am certainly not expecting it to start now by exercising humanitarian and compassionate grounds on any application, but I am also appalled at the Conservative approach of shutting the door on immigrants by simply reducing the number of applications the federal government accepts.

Does it really think this is an appropriate way to address the immigration inventory? This bill puts far too much discretionary power into the hands of the minister to cherry-pick the type immigrants that the Conservative Party would like to enter Canada.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada's mission is to build a stronger Canada. Let me read the mission statement for Citizenship and Immigration Canada. It states:

Developing and implementing policies, programs and services that:

Facilitate the arrival of persons and their integration to Canada in a way that maximizes their contribution to the country while protecting the health, safety and security of Canadians;

Maintain Canada's humanitarian tradition by protecting refugees and persons in need of protection; and

Enhance the values and promote the rights and responsibilities of Canadian citizenship.

That is a very important mission statement and I am not sure the minister has had time to read that herself. Perhaps the immigration minister should take a few minutes to try to familiarize herself with that because the mission statement very much clarifies and illustrates exactly what Canada is all about.

Possibly she is too busy selecting what immigrant she is going to fast track as she moves forward or perhaps she shares the view of the Prime Minister when he wrote in the 1988 Reform Party platform that immigration should not "radically or suddenly alter the ethnic makeup of Canada".

Using the budget implementation bill is an outrageous way to deliver promises made by the Reform Party 20 years ago. Immigration reforms should simply not be buried in a budget implementation bill.

If the government wants to table these changes, it should put them forward as a separate piece of legislation that can be studied by the appropriate House of Commons standing committee, as any other critical piece of legislation would be.

If Parliament is to work effectively for all Canadians, regardless of the fact that we are in a minority situation, we must have a full and honest debate on all critical issues, certainly including immigration reform.

*Government Orders*

I consider immigration to be critically important. It is a part of moving Canada forward. It is very important that we have an immigration system in Canada that will help to build our country in a positive way. I believe that requires all of us, not in a partisan approach, to sit down in a committee, maybe a special legislative committee if the government does not want to send it to the current citizenship and immigration committee. We need to have an opportunity to fully debate the reforms that the minister is talking about.

There are areas that I am sure we would all agree on to move forward and there are other areas that possibly we would not but on something as important as immigration in Canada, I do not believe we should be doing it while it is buried in a budget bill.

It has been suggested that we are having a debate today but it is not. We are dealing with a budget implementation bill. We need to spend many hours going over exactly what it is the minister wants to achieve. It should be done in a non-partisan manner at either a special legislative committee or in some other manner, where people with experience in dealing with immigration files could come forward. We could work together to bring forward some reforms to the immigration bill that would benefit all Canadians and not simply be done in a partisan manner in a budget implementation bill.

That is not the way we do things in Canada. I do not believe it is the way that we can build a country any more than I believe we should be pitting one province against another. I continue to see the politics of division happening across the way by the government. It is pitting communities against each other and provinces against each other. That is not the way to build a nation.

While the government is so busy throwing the “nation” word around, clearly that is not how to build a country. I call on the government to work much more cooperatively with us as we try to move our great country forward.

Many other issues were mentioned earlier, things that Liberals are concerned about. Picking and choosing who comes to Canada is not the Canadian way, nor is it the way that we should be moving things forward.

•(1525)

I want to thank the House for allowing me the opportunity to comment on Bill C-50. There are many issues in the legislation, but the immigration one concerns us on this side of the House a lot as we move forward to build a strong country together.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member for her comments with respect to some of the statements that were made by the deputy leader of the Liberal Party, the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore. He said that when it comes to immigration, his party did not get it done. The Liberals had 13 years in government with six immigration ministers. The member herself was a minister.

The member for Etobicoke Centre said on September 14, 2004, during a CBC interview:

I'm almost reaching the point where I believe that our whole immigration system has become dysfunctional. That in fact it's at the point of being broken.

The member herself indicated that it does not make sense for us to be continually taking names when the reality is that we need to change the system, make it more flexible, more responsible.

Does she not agree that change is necessary because the system was not working the way it had been structured under the previous 13 years? Does she not agree that it requires a legislative change? This bill will go to committee and she can add her thoughts to it then. The total portion of the amendment is about two pages and is not difficult to understand.

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Mr. Speaker, let me begin my response by saying how important immigration is to Canada. To continually find ways to improve our legislation should be on the top of the list for all of us in the House.

The reason 800,000 people are on lists is because many of those people are no longer alive, or many of them no longer want to come to Canada for different reasons, or many of them were fleeing countries because of economic issues but some of those countries are now in a much better state.

It is not a question of our immigration system not working. Many people want to come to Canada. We need to look at how we are handling application forms. Our current system does not allow us to say no. We have to take all applications as they come in. There are a variety of things that could be done by regulation.

All of us have an interest in seeing our immigration system to be the best that it can be. That is a natural interest for all of us. If that is the case, then why are we trying to sneak reforms into our immigration system through a budget implementation bill? Why is the issue not going to a special legislative committee?

If we do not want Bill C-50 to go to the current citizenship and immigration committee, then we all have to agree to is to send it to a special committee where we could spend a month or six or seven weeks going over it to make sure that it is the best that it can be. Why would we be afraid to debate it?

We have lots of opportunity to work together on this bill, but we cannot do that by sending it as part of a budget bill to the finance committee. It is irresponsible to send it there and expect finance committee members to suddenly become experts on immigration issues. We all know the complexity of the issues in and around immigration. I remind the House how important it is for us to do this right.

If there are going to be reforms, then let us do the reforms. The bill should be sent to committee so we can all work on it together.

•(1530)

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, does that mean you are going to vote against the bill because all these issues are that important? We are proposing an amendment that would take all of that out, so are you going to vote with us and against the government's bill? Is that what the Liberals are going to do?

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Outremont knows that the Speaker cannot vote. I cannot imagine that he was addressing his comment to me. I think he meant to address the hon. member for York West. The next time, of course, he will direct his remarks through the chair. I cannot vote.

*Government Orders*

The hon. member for York West.

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Mr. Speaker, this is an extremely important issue and it is not one that we should be pushing politics and trying to play games with.

If the NDP members really cared about the country they would be working with everyone to try to make things change and make some improvements. All they are interested in is trying to do showcasing and trying to shame and push people around.

We on this side of the House will do what we need to do when the time is right and when it is in the best interest of Canada.

**Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for York West for her extremely important and enlightening comments in her capacity as former minister of immigration and a very diligent member of Parliament on this file. She continues to remind us that it is extremely important for us to declare to Canadians why these changes are being made on the fly through a legislative piece that was brought back as a ways and means motion, a motion that I would suggest really is about covering the Conservative agenda with respect to important legislation.

Mr. Speaker, it is critical that you be in the chair today because I am on my feet not only because of this bill but because of what the bill is attempting to do.

The will of the House of Commons was expressed very clearly on March 5 of this year. This was after a ruling that you, Mr. Speaker, made some two years ago, but which was obviously lost on Conservative members, including the Minister of Finance. He assumed that once a bill was votable that it might have an impact with respect to lessening of tax that he should not consider this, not just once but in two separate budgets. He completely and utterly ignored and threw away prudent fiscal understanding of the implications of various bills which should have been routine and instead worked with several other people to try to suggest that my bill, Bill C-253, which would give a chance for families to save in a very real way, to save for post-secondary education, by making RESPs income tax deductible and completely forgot the principle of the importance of a decision made by the House.

The bill is nowhere near dead. As we know, the bill is before the other House and is now at second reading there. I hope it is given the equal consideration and time it takes to have an important piece of legislation passed.

It seems to me that when we are talking about the future of this country we may have differences of opinions as to how this country ought to be led and how it ought to be managed but the one thing we cannot disagree with are some of the imperatives.

Students face an incredible amount of debt. Over 50% of students right now face incredible crippling debts as they leave post-secondary education, long before they are able to pay any type of debt down. It is difficult enough for them to try to find a job.

In 10 years from now we know that the average cost of education, with four years in residence, will be \$100,000. Given the average income of families, I do not see how it will be possible under the current regime to have a situation where so many people will not

have access to the skills that come with higher education and the training that the global economy demands in order for Canada to remain competitive. It is a reality that we all as members of Parliament agree with.

I have spoken to several members of the Conservative Party who over the years supported this bill. Dare I say that they probably voted against the bill at the final reading, although the will of the House was expressed in much greater numbers, because they were jealous? They knew this was a policy that was good for the future of this country.

I have letter after letter and members of the House on all sides received letters from their constituents asking them time and time again to not kill the bill.

I am pleased to report that those rumours of the death of my bill, which were pronounced in some of the media and greatly exaggerated in some editorials, were only rumours. The same editorials also suggested, and I am hoping some of those editorialists are listening to this, that the bill was passed by stealth, that it required a royal recommendation. I will not benefit the author of several stories in one particular paper, but it was someone who actually thought that what had been done here by parliamentarians was tantamount to what happened in 1840, which is why Lord Durham had to be brought in.

There was no revolution here. There was instead a recognition and understanding that in a minority Parliament, in a setting where Canadians expect more from their parliamentarians, members of Parliament, backbench members of Parliament of all parties worked deliberatively, not for a day, not for a week, not for a month and not through gamesmanship, but over two years to ensure that a piece of legislation on RESP deductibility would in fact be put forward.

I am speaking today to the fact that the bill, far from being killed, is the subject of Bill C-50, which I will refer to as the killer-hunter bill proposed by the Minister of Finance.

The Minister of Finance's own riding of Whitby—Oshawa is one that I represented and I know that the Minister of Finance will know that this is so popular an issue if this is in fact going to be an election issue, which it could very well be. I know full well that it is something that I am prepared to take to the door of his riding, a riding I once represented. I can tell the House that anyone who has families, anyone who has children, anyone who wants to live the dream of this country will know that this legislation is not only timely it is supportable.

•(1535)

A decision made by this House of Commons, by these members of Parliament in the majority, is simply thrown away because someone has suggested that somehow it will put the country into fiscal danger.

Who put us there?

The Minister of Finance has an obligation, quite apart from his pathetic critique of the bill on RESP deductibility, which many of his members support, to explain to Canadians how it is that he took a \$13.2 billion surplus and blew it away overnight.

*Government Orders*

The member from British Columbia is looking this way.

What happens if we have another forest fire in that region of the country or floods in Quebec? What if we have a national disaster of some proportion that will cost us several hundred million dollars?

When we see that amount of money that could potentially put the country at risk, we have put ourselves in a very precarious financial situation and we have not planned for the future.

We know that south of the border the federal reserve chair, Mr. Bernanke, is suggesting that we are teetering on a recession. There is no doubt that there are implications for my province and for provinces across the country. This government did not plan. It had no plan. It is extinguishing the hopes and aspirations of young people to get access to a better job, to pay the kind of taxes, to grow the kind of country and to recognize that with an aging population we need to get this right and we need to get it right now.

This bill is not the be all end all. The bill that I proposed on the RESP, which this bill, Bill C-50, proposes to kill at some point down the road, is in fact decidedly a bill that is designed to use the issue of confidence before anything that the government disagrees with.

Yes, the hon. members will probably ask us whether we will be supporting this or not. That is still a few months off, perhaps even a few weeks off, but the one thing that is clear is the idea with respect to the RESP bill is something that we cannot ignore.

I am glad to hear the NDP members cat howling in the corner but they supported this bill. They have stood, and I applaud them for doing that, to support this bill because of its importance. The Bloc also supported this bill.

[*Translation*]

They know full well that it is very important for the future of our country that students have the opportunity to get an education regardless of cost. We also have an opportunity to help the provinces, which will give students more money to invest in their futures and to go on to universities, colleges or apprenticeships.

[*English*]

We must not fail the next generation. Universities that want to increase their capacity for investing in infrastructure, human and physical, will not need to go cap in hand to the provinces and say that they want to raise tuition fees. There is a greater certainty now that this vehicle addresses what ordinary average families have been looking for.

In one fell swoop, with this particular legislation, the Minister of Finance and the House leader crafted a bill to try to kill this. We can talk about the gamesmanship today, but what we have is an attempt at vandalizing and compromising the future of this nation.

We have a higher obligation to serve the interests of our constituents and to help somehow, in some way, to build a stronger nation, a stronger nation where people can get access to the kind of opportunities that this generation, many of us, have been blessed with.

Previous members who have come here have always tried to build a better House and to find ways in which we can come together to

find more creative means to ensuring Canada can meet the challenges of tomorrow.

I am saying this because if we were to sit down and talk to grandparents, parents and people in our communities who are struggling day in and day out to make ends meet, we would hear that there is a real and effective understanding of what they are trying to do, which is to achieve a better future for their children.

I would implore the Conservative Party, which has quietly said that it loves this bill, to actually take the time to consider what it has done. It has actually tried to reverse a position taken only a month ago by this Parliament which is widely popular with Canadians.

There will be critics either way but I would ask the Conservative Party to reconsider what it has done because I think it is in everyone's interest, partisanship aside, to ensure that good legislation, whether it is passed by backbenchers or passed by the government, does in fact have the ability to proceed.

I call on all members to work together cooperatively. This is for our future, for our children and for our Canada.

● (1540)

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I think that some of the people who have been listening to this debate might have a little bit of trouble following so I will try to put things in perspective.

The member who just spoke did back a bill on registered education savings plans. We in the NDP did indeed vote for it but it would not have been our first choice of a way of proceeding because we think it is important to help all families. I come from a family of 10 children. An education savings plan would not have helped a lot because there was nothing to put aside. There was no tax deduction to be had. Thanks to Quebec's excellent loans and bursaries program, I and almost all my brothers and sisters went through university.

However, the member is right. The Conservatives are undoing a bill adopted in the House. However, if the member really wants this bill to go through, he must vote with us against the Conservatives. The Liberals are the official opposition. It is very simple.

He said before that he was imploring the government. I would just say to my good friends in the Liberal Party that for the sake of their role as the official opposition, they must get off their knees. They do not need to implore anybody. They are here to vote and represent the people in their riding. They should have the guts to do it.

Your colleague just spoke before about—

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. I would remind hon. members not to lapse into the second person.

The hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East.

*Government Orders*

**Hon. Dan McTeague:** Mr. Speaker, I did not hear a question but I do understand the member's passion. However, I want the member's passion to be focused in a way that is the best way to achieve a very good piece of legislation. I can appreciate the fact that he is trying to make a political point but I also understand the same member supported this bill. I agree with him. We do need to find a way to get this bill through. The tactics of today will not diminish the importance of this legislation.

I can tell the hon. member, having grown up in a family of 10 and having 5 children of my own, I know how difficult it is, having struggled to put myself through university when my parents were not capable of looking after my interests.

What is important is for all us as members of Parliament to recognize very clearly that in this legislation we can use some of the savings that is there to ensure that students whose parents do pay taxes or cannot pay taxes, that we improve the child learning account from the savings that would otherwise accrue from the existing system which no longer works.

The hon. member asked how I will vote and I think he knows how I will vote on this.

I am saying this because, beyond the cut and thrust of politics and beyond the cut and thrust of question period, Canadians will judge all of us as to how we were able to appropriate this bill, how we stood for what we believed in and, most important, I will have no difficulty, if the hon. member heard my speech, taking this battle to the Minister of Finance and to his colleagues. I need the hon. member's help to do that.

Appreciating that the member was not here in the last Parliament, but if he is concerned about how the Conservatives got elected, his party may want to ask why it ruined the Liberal Party in terms of its own background and in terms of the things that we put forward for Canadians.

I would ask the hon. member, in the spirit of goodwill and in the spirit of the future of this country, to stand up for his constituents.

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we have just seen a political pretzel act unparalleled in this House. We have a member standing and actually working with his Liberal caucus to kill a bill that he was promoting a few weeks before and trying to explain that all on CPAC as people watch the deliberations in this House this afternoon. It is absolutely absurd what the Liberals are trying to do in the House. They are voting for the bill that kills what the member was promoting a few weeks ago.

Unabashedly, the Liberals are now standing, wrapped up like pretzels, trying to explain why they are killing a bill that a few weeks ago they supported and why they are supporting the government that is killing that bill. It is absolutely absurd.

I can only ask one question. When will the Liberals actually show some backbone and vote against the government on something?

• (1545)

**Hon. Dan McTeague:** Mr. Speaker, what is good about being a member of the New Democratic Party with 29 members is that they never need to worry about being responsible. They never need to

worry about being government because we saw what happened in the province of Ontario when that did happen.

The member said that he was prepared to throw away everything about his vote, which was on CPAC, supporting this bill in favour of making a political statement. I think that is regrettable. However, if that is what the New Democrat member believes, that is fine.

However, despite the catcalls and the heckling, it is their responsibility to ensure in the first instance that this legislation continues. Unless he has a crystal ball, he cannot predict the future.

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have to catch my breath because we have just seen a political spectacle that is absolutely unbelievable, Liberals rising to kill their own legislation and trying to explain it. They are killing the legislation to save it. It is absolutely bizarre.

I am rising to speak to Bill C-50 which would kill what the Liberals were promoting a few weeks ago. I would like to comment on what the Conservative government is doing now that it has been given essentially a blank cheque by the leader of the Liberal Party to do whatever it wants to do in the House of Commons. We saw it with the SPP, the security prosperity partnership going on behind closed doors, allowed by the Liberals.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that I am splitting my time with the member for Winnipeg North. She will be equally tender, I think, to members of the opposition who are being hypocritical.

We have seen with climate change the refusal to take any meaningful action on the environment supported by an appallingly weak Liberal leader. There is the tax cut agenda. Corporate tax cuts were just shovelled off the back of a truck, billions and billions of dollars, when there are crucial crying needs in Canadian communities from coast to coast to coast that are not being met, again supported by the Liberals.

Now we see with Bill C-50 that because the Conservatives have a functional majority, a blank cheque from the Liberal Party to do whatever they want, they have decided to tuck in to a budget bill substantial changes to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. They are substantial changes that are going to have an impact on communities throughout the country. They are doing it because of the acquiescence of the Liberal Party.

Normally a bill of this nature would be brought to the House of Commons. It would be debated if members of Parliament agreed that it should continue on. Very clearly in this case because the legislation is so appallingly bad, members would say no. But if there were agreement in principle on the legislation, it would go to committee for close scrutiny clause by clause so that we could be absolutely certain that the legislation actually did an effective job. Then it would come back to the House.

*Government Orders*

However, because the Liberal leader is so appallingly weak, the Conservatives just threw in this legislation and they are expecting the leader of the Liberal Party and every single Liberal member of Parliament, who even though in oral questions they will raise questions, are refusing to vote against the bill. The Conservative government is expecting that the Liberals are going to adopt the legislation. There will be no scrutiny. There will be no parliamentary hearings. There will be no scrutiny of substantial changes that turn back the clock on our immigration process.

We have already seen over the past decade what Liberal and Conservative cuts have done to our immigration system. In fact, in the last two years alone, the waiting lists have grown from 700,000 to 900,000 because the immigration system frankly has broken down. It is like a hospital; if we do not adequately fund it or bring in nurses and doctors, the system is not going to work.

The immigration system, I can say from personal experience representing Burnaby—New Westminster, has broken down. The system is not working in the interests of Canadian families. It is not working for new Canadians. Everyone in Canada is paying the cost of that negligence.

I represent a community where over 100 languages are spoken. It is the most diverse part of Canada. Indeed, it may be the most diverse part of the entire planet. Over 100 languages are spoken. There are substantial centres of faith, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh, Hindu, Jewish, Baha'i and Hare Krishna. Throughout our community we have attracted people from all over the world. We have a substantial community of people of Chinese origin, from both mainland China and Taiwan and also Hong Kong, an Indo Canadian community from the Tamil south but also from the Punjab north of India.

Historically we have people from Scandinavia, England, France, Germany and eastern Europe as well. It is immigration, wave after wave, that has created our community. Issues about the immigration system and how those families abroad are treated are of fundamental importance to our community.

● (1550)

Now we have these amendments that have been thrown in by the Conservatives only because of Liberal acquiescence, only because of a lack of Liberal backbone that will mean profound changes and that the system will even get worse. What are the changes the Conservatives are proposing?

They are proposing changes that simply give new powers to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration in a system that is already dysfunctional, to simply make decisions on the minister's own around deciding, for example, the types of applications that are accepted and disposing of current immigration applications. That is important because the Conservatives have tried to pretend that they have dealt with the mess that was left by the previous Liberal government, but they have not.

As I mentioned earlier, the waiting lists have grown by 200,000 and only in two years. Now we see a political situation where the solution by the Conservatives will simply be to strike off those legitimate applications. They will simply do what they did with the softwood lumber sellout. The Conservatives killed the softwood

industry in order to save it. We all remember the Minister of International Trade saying that essentially the softwood lumber agreement was going to save the softwood industry. What we have seen since is the death of thousands upon thousands of jobs and the closure of dozens upon dozens of mills across the country.

If that was the solution to the softwood lumber crisis, we can imagine what these Conservatives are going to do to the immigration system. They are simply going to erase applicants. These changes to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act permit them to do that.

They will also put in place queue jumping measures that simply are not in keeping with the impartial access system that we have, that allows the best of applicants from around the world to come to Canada.

There are also limits on humanitarian and compassionate categories. This is an extremely important element. This is perhaps the most egregious element of what the Conservatives are introducing with Liberal support. It is important to note that the Liberals and Conservatives are working together on this issue. They are simply giving the minister additional powers to deny visas to those who meet all the categories, the immigration criteria. This is no longer subject to legal appeal.

By putting in a budget bill a few lines on the immigration act what they are essentially doing is eliminating the legal avenue that people have when the immigration ministry screws up. It screws up enormously because of underfunding, because of Liberal cuts, because the Conservatives have simply not addressed fundamental management issues. They are not very good at management. They are only good at corporate tax cuts it seems. They have done nothing for the health care system, nothing for the lost manufacturing jobs. I could go on and on.

Essentially, the Conservative Prime Minister learned his administration from a book. He had never actually administered anything when he became the leader of the Conservative Party. As a result of that we can see how poorly they act in public administration.

If the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration and the ministry are incapable of handling appropriately a legitimate file, there is no longer any legal appeal on it. This is of fundamental importance. What the government is doing is removing that legal avenue when it screws up. I can say that not only in this area, but in a whole host of other areas there have been screw ups. For example, in the case work that I deal with in my riding with the Canada Revenue Agency, that agency makes mistakes. There has to be a legal appeal.

When the ability for individuals to go through the legal system when the government screws up is taken away, we are eliminating one of the fundamental rights of democracy. That is exactly what the government is doing here. It is eliminating that legal appeal.

These are not small changes. It is a testament to Liberal hypocrisy that even though the Liberals are speaking in this House against this bill, they are prepared to vote for it. They are prepared to give the Conservative government a blank cheque when it comes to these fundamental changes in the immigration system.



*Government Orders*

This bill is not going to improve our immigration system. This is not the prudent and smart approach of rebuilding the administration that was gutted under the previous Liberal government. This is essentially giving political direction to the Conservative government to eliminate folks the Conservatives do not like, to eliminate lists they do not like, and to ensure that there is no legal avenue for those who are appealing bad decisions by the government.

• (1555)

We would not want to see this in immigration. We would not want to see this with Revenue Canada. We would not want to see this in any sector of public life, because the reality is when government screws up, we need to have those legal methods of appeal.

That is just one of the very many reasons why the NDP, in this corner of the House, is not just going to be talking about this bill, but we are actually going to stand up as members of Parliament and we are going to vote against this budget bill when the time comes to vote for or against it. That is our responsibility.

**Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to tell my hon. friend that I think life would be pretty simple if we only had black and white film in our cameras, as clearly he is viewing many policies that come before this House.

I would dare say that we on the Liberal side feel that we are the party of immigrants. We are the party of the charter.

This issue could well be taken to committee, and I would encourage a vigorous debate so that Canadians can make their voices heard.

I do not think that anybody in this House would purport that we have a perfect immigration system. I happen to have an urban riding in Kitchener in the heart of the Waterloo region. It is one of the fastest growing, distinctly diverse communities in Canada. I deal with immigration cases all the time and I can say that the system is not perfect. I can say that the two per cent increase the government is suggesting, as it imbedded this important piece of legislation by stealth, yet again, in its budget bill, is very unacceptable.

However, to deny Canadians the ability to talk about how we could improve the system, whether the appeal system is appropriate and how we can deal with the backlog, I would agree with my hon. friend, I do not believe that this is the way to go. I do believe that we have a moment when we could have Canadians come to have a vigorous debate and we could improve this system.

Because he has black and white film in his camera, and it is either thumbs up or thumbs down, he is ready at this point just to say thumbs down, that he does not want to hear from Canadians, he does not want to take this opportunity to improve the immigration system. I would ask him what his party would purport to do to improve the waiting lists and the processing of immigrants to Canada.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Mr. Speaker, I like the hon. member, I always have. She is trapped in this same disingenuous incapacity of the Liberal Party to stand for anything. I feel sorry for her, as I do for some of her colleagues who actually do believe in things, yet they are forced by their leader to acquiesce to anything the Conservative government presents. That is what we are debating here today.

Yes, we see it as an issue that we have to vote no on. That is why we have offered the amendment that simply removes that portion of the budget bill which the government, by stealth, inserted. If members from three corners of this House vote for the amendment, then that is simply removed from the budget bill. That is what the NDP has done. We have said, as has the Bloc, as has the Liberal Party, that this is bad. This is a bad initiative by the government, and so we have taken steps to stop that initiative.

What I do not understand is why the Liberal Party will be voting against our amendment and supporting the Conservatives so that they can bring into play something that the Liberals have said they do not want. This is the hypocrisy which undeniably is something that is difficult to explain to any Canadian.

If the Liberal Party is opposed to what the Conservatives are doing on immigration, then they should vote for the NDP amendment and they should stop that initiative.

• (1600)

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that the member is opposed to the fact that we are going to increase the numbers and make the process quicker.

Last year Canada welcomed the highest number of newcomers in our history, 429,000-plus, surpassing the previous high in 1911.

Although the New Democrats object to the Liberals not voting, the NDP members vote consistently against everything because they know that it will not make a difference. They voted against the \$1.3 billion in new settlement funding for newcomers in Canada. They voted against the Foreign Credentials Referral Office, something that was necessary, in the budget. They voted against cutting the \$975 immigrant head tax. They will be voting against reducing immigration wait times.

Although they castigate the Liberals and say that they do not vote because they are afraid to, the NDP members know that they will not form government and they vote against everything. How can he justify voting against streamlining the system, bringing more people in quicker, faster and more efficiently?

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Mr. Speaker, quite simply, that is not what the Conservatives have done, and the member knows that full well. What we have actually seen is a bloated waiting list, from 700,000 to 900,000, over two years, as a result of Conservative inability to put in place public administration.

This is the problem. This is why the Conservative budget basically shovels tens of billions of dollars off the back of a truck to the wealthy corporate sector, which is the most profitable and has record profits. The only thing the Conservatives seem to be able to do is corporate tax cuts and—

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** Create jobs.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** —create temporary part time jobs. As the member well knows, two-thirds of Canadians are earning less now than they were a number of years ago and people are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet.

Conservatives are a one-note band. Corporate tax cuts is all they can do and that is the reality of their very poor public administration.

*Government Orders*

**Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join in the debate, following my colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster, who has put on record a very eloquent speech on what is wrong with the budget implementation bill as well as what is so wrong with the Liberal positioning on the legislation and on the budget process.

You have taught us many things in the House, Mr. Speaker. You are the longest standing member in the House of Commons. You have always exemplified integrity, honesty and consistency. That is the example we all need to learn from today.

Today in the House, Mr. Speaker, you also mentioned the passing of a long-standing member of Parliament for the New Democratic Party, Mark Rose, who was also the chair of the NDP caucus. He was also a man of integrity. He is another example for the House, at a very critical time in the history of this nation when we are dealing with a government that is as meanspirited and cold-hearted as we could get and with an official opposition party that is so hypocritical, twisted and torn that it is making it impossible to provide any motive to Canadians for believing in the political process.

There is an old saying that we, as parents, have learned over the years, which is we have to say what we mean, mean what we say and do what we said we would do. I would ask the Liberals in the House today to find it within themselves—

**Mr. James Moore:** Who?

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair:** Every single one of them.

**Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis:** —even though there are none here, and I know I cannot comment on that. However, in the absence of Liberals in the House, I hope they are listening out in the lobby. They know they are sending a terrible message to Canadians. It does not matter what they stand for, it does not matter what they believe in, if they believe in anything, because their principles go out the window the first chance political expediency matters, the first chance they have an option to stand up for something they believe or worry about their backsides and their political future.

This is a time, especially around a budget, where we have to stand for something. We have been through this.

I was a cabinet minister and then an MLA in Manitoba. It was at a time when there was lots of turbulence when we were suddenly defeated in March of 1988 on a budget vote. We stood for something and did not back off our position, even though we knew the opposition Conservatives were gunning for an election. We did it even though we knew we had a loose cannon in our midst, who was edging for a cabinet position and did not want to support an NDP government unless he got his way. We also knew that when it came to being an opposition party in a minority parliament in Manitoba, and we were not in any position to fight an election, we had to choose if we would support a Conservative government, with regret and with qualifications, or would we run and hide.

We did not run and hide. That is the worst thing we can do in politics and the last thing that should be done in terms of Canadian life today. It tells Canadians that everything that is near and dear to our democratic system does not matter because principles can go out the window at a whim.

What the Liberals are doing is a great disservice to democracy in our country. We are not talking, as the member for Kitchener Centre has said, about grey areas of certain issues. We are talking about good versus bad, right versus wrong, evil versus heavenly good, whatever we want to say. We are talking about diametrically opposing ideas and we have to choose. We are faced with a Conservative government today that is absolutely squandering of our fiscal capacity in a way that will hurt the majority of Canadians, not for a short term but for many years to come. The government is killing our future because it is not investing a penny to save our health care system. It is not doing a thing for education or housing.

● (1605)

On housing, when the budget came down, we asked if there was anything in the budget for it. It turns out there are \$110 million for five pilot projects in centres across the country. That is it. It is designated for mental health issues. That is good, but it is a tiny piece of the puzzle when it comes to a huge problem in terms of housing and the problems facing people with mental illnesses.

The government just this week cut back funding for the Kali Shiva AIDS Services in Winnipeg. Why? Because it is an organization devoted to helping the homeless and other people who are in danger of harming others.

In Winnipeg we are trying to stop people from harming others and to help people to help themselves. What does the government do? It cuts back funding for the Kali Shiva AIDS Services because it is doing too much work on harm reduction. Can members believe that?

This follows the fact that the government will not invest in aboriginal housing. We just had a huge, devastating fire in Pukatawagan where three children died because of the terrible housing conditions on that reserve.

If the member for Kitchener Centre were still in the room, she would know that not too long ago hearings were held in her riding around pharmacare and access to drugs. She will know that adults in her city are crying because they have lost their jobs due to the cuts to the manufacturing sector. They have been left without any drug coverage.

This is not grey matter. This is not shades of wrong. This is wrong. This is evil. This is bad public policy. The Liberal Party should stand up and fight it just as we are, without regard for our political necks and our political future. We have to put our principles on the line.

When it comes to the whole immigration issue, people have to understand why we are so worried. We are worried because we have a government that says it will deal with a backlog to allow more economic immigrants in the country. In fact, the Conservatives have turned back people who have already been approved because they are needed to fill skills shortages and to meet the economic needs of our country. Why? Because they do not like something about the family. In the case to which I am referring, it is because a child in the family has a disability.

*Government Orders*

Is this the real intention of the government when it comes to changing the immigration policy? Is it in fact an ideological move on the part of Conservatives to shape the face of our country to exclude certain groups of people that they do not find acceptable, that they treat as second class citizens? What kind of message are we sending to people in our country, people who are living with disabilities? Are we saying that they are not welcome if they have a disability, or that they are second class, that they do not matter and that they might as well be dead. When have we heard that before? That is what is so troubling about the government's agenda.

If the Conservatives were serious about opening our doors to people who have skills to bring then they would in fact ensure they would not turn their back on people who are approved under provincial nominee programs, as they have been in Manitoba. They would not turn those families back because their child has a disability. They would not turn them back because they come from the wrong part of the world. They would not turn them back because they have the energy and the fortitude to contribute something to our country. Then we would have a government willing to deal with the backlog that the Liberals created in a reasoned way. The problems we are dealing with now go back to a decade of Liberal neglect on a very important file.

About six years ago we dealt with major changes to the immigration bill. I was the NDP critic at the time. It was a flawed bill. As a result, we have flawed legislation before us today. We tried to amend it. The Liberals resisted every attempt to improve the bill. We presented, on our side alone, over 100 amendments to try to ensure that the economic class was improved so people could get here under a point system. We tried to document the backlog under Liberals and the waiting time of seven years or more for family sponsorships.

• (1610)

We tried to say that the government and this nation had no business denying people because they had a disability. We tried to suggest that there had to be due process and a refugee appeal process that made sense in this day and age. The Liberals refused each and every one of those amendments. Now, in fact, the Conservatives are doing exactly what they have every right to do, which is to take that legislation and apply it as the Liberals had intended.

We had a chance then and now we have another chance today to actually deal with this problem. The only way to seriously deal with this is for the House to support the NDP amendment to move this out of the budget bill. Let us make sure that we have, as the Liberals want, good debate and discussion at the committee around future immigration policy. Let us get on with the job at hand and reject the budget because it is bad news for Canada and for future generations.

**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, I have a question for my colleague. I have always respected her as a parliamentarian from Winnipeg who brings great passion to her values and to her constituents. That is always a great thing to see in the House of Commons.

However, I would just ask her about this, in the fairness of debate. She actually said at one point in her comments that Conservatives

are taking their position on this bill because their message to new Canadians might be that they may as well just be dead. That is a little extreme. In essence that is what she said: cold-hearted and extremist. It is good enough in a democracy, I think, with clear-headed people of principle, to just disagree on the merits of the bill. We do not have to go to the extent of the name calling that we heard. It was kind of unfortunate.

I do have a question for my colleague. As a politician, I do admire someone who has a strategic sense of things. We hear the Liberals in question period and in their speeches here in the House just raising the temperature. They are thoroughly angry. They really do not like this bill. They really think it needs to be shut down. They really want it stopped, almost to the point where they are going to vote against it, but it is not quite that bad.

I would invite my colleague from the NDP to comment on the Liberals and their false rhetoric on this issue, where they are so angry and they are so opposed, but they really are not quite prepared to actually stand up and walk their talk.

• (1615)

**Ms. Judy Wasylcia-Leis:** Mr. Speaker, I would address that question by suggesting that the Liberals do no service to this country when, instead of standing up, taking a side and choosing a position, they either walk out, sit on their bums, or engage in historical precedent-setting abstentions. We saw in this House, for the first time ever in this country, I think, a whipped abstention. I think I have said enough on that point. I think the record holds.

What I really want to do is respond to my Conservative colleague's comments about people living with disabilities. This is not a laughing matter. This is a serious matter that has to be named for what it is. He is part of a government that has chosen to turn back immigrants who have been approved under the economic class, under the Manitoba provincial nominee program, because one of the members in their families is living with a disability.

These are kids. These are kids who have a lot to contribute to our society today. If he wants, I will give him all kinds of documents so he can see that these are kids who play basketball, ride motorbikes, vote, talk, and give to their society. When a society like ours in Canada, in a wealthy country like ours, says they are not welcome because they have a disability, what message does that send? Is it not like saying they are second class? Is it not like saying they are better off dead?

I will quote from an article by an organization that has written about this issue. The Canadian Association for Community Living says the following:

It is important to emphasize not only that prospective immigrants are devalued and their dignity offended by the pejorative stereotyping that underpins the excessive demands provisions, but also that Canadians with disabilities are given the message that persons like them are not welcome in Canada. Canadians with disabilities see themselves identified by 'impairments' and branded as a burden on the public purse, with no value attached to their role in society. The disparate and adverse impact experienced by prospective immigrants with disabilities also undermines the value placed on Canada as a diverse nation. By implication, the message given to all Canadians is that persons with disabilities are to be screened out as inferior, second-class members of society.

*Government Orders*

That is what is so repugnant. That is what has to be changed.

**Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments. I think of my own family. Quite a while ago, we were immigrants in this country. Some of my family came in 1638 as economic refugees of Normandy and areas of France where they could not find work. They came with zero education. They did not come to accept research chairs at some university or come here with great skills. They came to take the stumps out of swamps and build dikes.

The other side of my family arrived in 1820. One member was an escaped prisoner of war at the time of the Napoleonic wars. He escaped from a prisoner of war prison in Halifax while building the highway with a pickaxe. He hid out for some 20 years and later became a Canadian citizen and a member of the provincial legislature.

I think what this country needs is people, people who want to come to Canada, and more of them. To limit ourselves to only a certain set, to only the people who meet the desires, needs and aspirations of the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, will not build the country as we have built it, with the Irish, the Chinese, the Ukrainians and all the other races that make up this great country.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, very briefly.

**Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis:** Mr. Speaker, the member and I obviously agree on this point, so I have a question for my dear Liberal colleague. If he feels as passionately as we do about this issue, will he stand with us, support the amendment and defeat the budget? Because that, in the end, is the only message that will stop the government on its path of negligent and destructive behaviour, which in fact selects immigrants on the basis of their race.

**The Deputy Speaker:** We are going to have to end it there.

Before I proceed to resuming debate, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Kitchener Centre, National Defence; and the hon. member for Malpeque, Archer Daniels Midland.

[*Translation*]

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

• (1620)

**Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to speak in this House on behalf of my party, the Bloc Québécois, on the subject of Bill C-50, the Budget Implementation Act, 2008.

When a political party sets about analyzing a budget, it always does so responsibly. That is what the Bloc Québécois has always done in recent years, in considering the various budgets that have been introduced in this House. The position we take as our guide, and in fact what has always been our one and only position, is whether the budget presented in Ottawa is in the interests of Quebecers. The Bloc Québécois has no ambition other than to stand up for the interests of Quebecers in this House, every day, and every time its members rise to speak. And Quebecers have rewarded us well for that work, because since 1993 a majority of the

representatives of Quebec here in the House have been Bloc Québécois members.

Once again, we have analyzed this budget and its history, because this most recent budget in fact has an extraordinary history. As far back as we can remember, the crisis in manufacturing and forestry that has hit Quebec, and also Ontario—Quebec is not alone—is one of the biggest crises that those industries have experienced in their entire histories.

It is huge. I recall that 150,000 jobs have been lost in Quebec in the last five years, 70,000 of them in the last two years, since the Conservatives came to power. Thus, when governments are investing or preparing a budget, they need to make an effort to tackle that crisis or problem.

In terms of the brief history of this budget, we have to remember the prebudget episode when the Conservative government decided not to deal with the forestry and manufacturing crises in the budget. In fact, that was clear in the prebudget consultations initiated by the Minister of Finance.

The political pressure brought to bear on the government by the Bloc Québécois, for one, but also by some other parties in this House, prompted the government to decide to create a trust fund even before the budget was introduced. The fund consists of \$1 billion taken out of last year's surplus, the surplus for 2007-08. That surplus was originally \$11.2 billion, and now stands at \$10.2 billion.

Unfortunately, this money is not allocated based on the percentage of job losses by province, but on a per capita basis. This was the introduction to the Conservative philosophy. In other words, while this crisis affects Quebec and Ontario, the money for solving this problem was not allocated as it was for the mad cow crisis at the time. In that case, the money was given to the provinces where farmers were affected, primarily in western Canada. But no, this time the government decided that the money would be allocated on a per capita basis. And thus, when we consider population numbers and the minimum amount to be paid to each province, Alberta received more money than Quebec.

When each province receives a minimum of \$10 million, since Alberta has fewer people than Quebec, the per capita amount is higher. So more money per person was paid to Alberta than to Quebec or Ontario. Lastly, it has been shown that this crisis was not overestimated. Although the crisis was acknowledged, the government said that it was not just taking place in Quebec and Ontario, but that jobs were being lost elsewhere as well. So it tried to minimize the crisis by allocating the money this way.

And the terrible thing is not just how the money was allocated but that it was made conditional on the passage of the budget. The Conservatives took it one step further. And this is recent history; it happened in the last three months.

• (1625)

We saw that pressure from the Bloc Québécois made them back off. As it turned out, the condition for passing the budget was no longer a condition, except for the fact that it paved the way for the budget.

*Government Orders*

It should have come as no surprise that the budget did not include anything else for the forestry and manufacturing sectors, except for a few small adjustments to tax deductions that I will read out later on.

Among other things, the budget includes accelerated capital cost allowance for equipment purchases. When businesses are allowed to amortize a larger portion of their assets, they have less net income and therefore pay less income tax. That is how these measures end up being tax cuts. However, for a company to accelerate its capital cost allowance or to use these deductions, that company has to have made a profit. But the problem with the forestry and manufacturing sectors in Quebec is that nobody made a profit. So it turns out that the only thing the Conservative government put on the table was its \$1 billion trust divided by the number of residents, which means that Quebec will receive \$216 million—\$71 million per year—to make up for the loss of 150,000 jobs in the past five years. That is nothing, nothing at all considering the size of the problem.

The Minister of Labour was talking about a piece of steak and how people had to be able to eat it. Watching him talk about it was quite something. Let us eat this piece of steak. Except that what he said he wanted to do with the money was diversify the economy. The Conservatives are quite a sight to behold when they get going.

Trees will keep on growing, but jobs will be created in industries other than forestry. That is more or less the message he was sending, the same message he sends us every day: the government wants to diversify the economy.

Municipalities are watching their mills close and their forestry and manufacturing businesses shut their doors. All of these people have acquired skills and experience over the years. Many of those who lost their jobs were 50 years old or older. It is not easy for people to retrain and get new jobs in a diversified economy. Often, these people are coping with difficult family situations in monoculture regions where the forest has always been there. I repeat, the trees will keep on growing.

Once again, what the Conservatives are proposing is that the entire segment of the economy called the forest disappear. They will do other things, and one day, it will reappear. There is no short-, medium-, or long-term strategy. Sorry, they do have a short-term strategy: they are trying to win an election. They want to become a big strong government, a majority government with a lot of power. Having that power but not being able to help our citizens facing problems accomplishes nothing.

I look at the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, the member for Pontiac. Six plants have closed in his riding. But he has a lot of power; he is an important minister, a very important minister. They want to create all kinds of jobs, except that Pontiac is a bit like part of my community, where more than 45% of jobs are in the forestry sector. They will try to transform all of that. Into what, I am not sure. They will create call centres; they will transform the economy.

I said it earlier, the trees will keep on growing, and forestry should continue to be the economic mainstay of Pontiac. They should be able to modernize and adapt businesses, help them to become better in order to face international competition. The trees in Pontiac, like those in Papineau and many other regions such as Saguenay—Lac-

Saint-Jean, Mauricie, the Eastern Townships, Bois-Francs, and all regions in Quebec, will keep on growing. They deserve to be managed responsibly and put on the market with added value. We should be able to sell our products worldwide.

But, that is not what the Conservative government wants to do. No. They are diversifying the economy. They are not trying to strengthen these businesses. With these employees who have all of this experience gained from generation to generation, they will change everything and they will try to diversify the economy. They will inject \$71 million a year into Quebec, a total of \$216 million, and that will solve all of the problems. How nice.

● (1630)

You will not be surprised to hear that we are voting against this budget. It is a budget that lacks vision for the medium and long terms and completely abandons the manufacturing and forestry industries. The government has not completely turned its back on the manufacturing industry. It is still generous to the manufacturing sector called the oil companies. It grants the oil companies accelerated capital cost allowance. It is in the budget. The government is helping those who are making exorbitant profits and does not care about the rest. It is terrible and not very subtle, but that is their way of doing things.

Right now, they do not care about anything. They are just trying to get support from those who make money. Currently the oil companies are making money every day to the detriment of taxpayers by selling fuel for more than it is worth. That is the reality. We have been fighting for years in this House to have a strong competition bureau to prevent this collusion, which, since the Conservatives have been in power, has made gas more expensive than ever. The oil companies have never made so much money and there is no end in sight.

Every time a budget is tabled—we see this in the environment—the Minister of the Environment wants to introduce measures to give the oil companies credits because they are going to make great efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It is not the oil companies, but the taxpayers who should pay. Those poor companies do not have any money, they are going through tough times and if we want them to stay, we have to do something. Canada is the only country in the world that does not regulate its natural resources.

These oil companies are exploiting a resource that belongs to the public. The oil in the ground does not belong to them. It is public property that should belong to the state. However, once again, the Conservatives have decided to give the oil companies everything they want and allow them to exploit this natural resource. They can do what they want with it. They can even sell it to whomever they want. It is quite surprising to realize that out of everything that is produced in the west, absolutely nothing is sold to Quebec. Because of the Borden line, not a single gallon of gas or a single litre of oil from the west is sold in Quebec, which imports fuel from other countries. That is the reality.

Once again, Quebecers pay 25% of all the tax credits granted to the big oil companies that exploit petroleum in the rest of Canada, and for which they receive no economic benefit because the oil is not sold here in Quebec.

*Government Orders*

That is the reality and that is the Conservative way of operating. Like us, some people are not surprised because that is the history. Obviously, the Conservatives have always been like that. They let free enterprise have its way; they let the markets take over and they say that things will right themselves. It is not important that segments of the economy are disappearing. Some day, these will come back. They do not know how. They, in particular, are the ones who want to know how it will work.

As far as the manufacturing and forestry sectors are concerned, it is very important to look at what was in the budget. For the manufacturing and forestry sectors, the first measure is an extension of accelerated depreciation for production equipment and rolling stock. That is what I said earlier. Depreciation is an expense that can be entered on a balance sheet; it is an accounting expense that is not necessarily money. Someone bought equipment, but the expense cannot be written off in the same year because the equipment will be used for a long time. It used to be depreciated over 10, 15 or 20 years, but now it can be depreciated more quickly.

Here, again, they add an expense that reduces income. This all very well when you are making a profit. One can increase expenses with write-offs, which will reduce income. However, that does absolutely no good when a company does not produce income, as is the case for most of the forestry companies and many manufacturing companies that we have seen close their doors. It does not help.

It would be rather difficult to make depreciation refundable since it is a company expense. However, if they were given a tax credit that could be refundable, that would be quite different. The company would then be entitled to a tax credit. If it had no income, it could not reduce its expenses and pay less tax; and if it was decided since they had not made a profit to issue them a cheque to refund that tax credit, that would be interesting.

• (1635)

That is not how the Conservatives do things. This is probably because they only deal with lobbyists who have lots of money, while those who do not are of little interest. That is the reality.

I want to turn now to the second measure in the budget. Some \$250 million will be available over five years to subsidize investments in research and development, but only in the automobile industry. There has evidently been an economic downturn in Ontario. And so there is a measure to invest \$250 million. I am not an Ontario member and so I will leave it to the Liberals who represent many of the Ontario ridings. Even if they wanted to try to challenge the budget, they would not have the strength to rise and vote against this. That is the reality and we will have to live with it. It is up to them to judge this \$250 million for Ontario. One thing is clear though: there is nothing to help the manufacturing and forest sectors to modernize and do some research and development. It is specifically for the automotive sector.

The third minor change is a tax credit for research and development. Once again, the government is increasing the ceiling, but these famous tax credits are strictly for companies that are making a profit. The government is allowing an increase in the tax credits. This means that the more money a company makes, the less it pays in taxes and the more research and development it can do. There is a problem though: many forestry and manufacturing

companies did not make a profit last year and therefore cannot benefit from tax credits. If a company does not make money, tax credits do not do it any good. If the tax credits were refundable—as the Bloc Québécois has always suggested—things would be different. Even if a company did not make money and did not have any profits, it would still be entitled and would get a cheque to allow it to invest in research and development. But once again, that is not how the Conservatives do things.

There is also \$10 million over two years to promote Canada's forestry sector as a model for innovation on international markets. This is the only direct assistance for the forestry sector in the budget, only \$5 million a year. That is the reality.

The Conservatives wanted to get \$250 million out of the budget for the automotive sector—\$5 million a year—and \$10 million for the forestry sector. The rest was in their famous \$1 billion trust negotiated before the budget. It was conditional, though, on the budget being passed. That was their first threat: if we wanted to help people, we would have to pass the budget.

The Bloc brought the necessary pressure to bear and the government finally backed down. So what did Quebec get out of it? The money was divided up not by the number of jobs lost per province but by the number of inhabitants. Everybody knew it was Quebec and Ontario that were suffering. Their premiers said so over and over. Mr. Charest and Mr. McGuinty loudly proclaimed that they were most affected. But no. The Conservatives were squarely opposed and decided to distribute the money on a per capita basis, with a minimum amount for each province.

I will say it again because it bears repeating: As a result, Alberta received more money than Quebec because there was a minimum of \$10 million per province plus so much per inhabitant. Given that Quebec's population is greater, Quebec was given less money per capita than Alberta.

That is strange. At the time of the mad cow crisis, money was distributed where the problem arose. The western provinces were affected and no one from the Bloc stood up to say that all the money was paid out west. That is not true. We asked that a portion be paid to Quebec because the crisis affected the sale of culled cows in Quebec. Therefore, we asked for some compensation. We did not protest because all the money was going out west. That is not true. There was a crisis and it had to be dealt with. We were always very fair.

However, when the Conservatives are making the decisions, it is not the same. When Quebec and Ontario are involved, things are never the same. They have to be able to give something to everyone. It is impossible for Quebec to receive more money and so forth. That is really something. When we try to ask the question, even of the Quebec ministers, they simply answer that Quebec has the equalization formula and that the fiscal imbalance has been resolved.

*Government Orders*

The fiscal imbalance and equalization apply to all provinces and not just Quebec. Equalization is entrenched in the Canadian constitution: wealthier provinces will support poorer provinces. The Conservatives have impoverished Quebec over the years by eliminating Quebec's automotive industry and concentrating it in Ontario. They are doing the same thing with the aerospace industry. When I first became an MP, 62% of the aerospace industry was in Quebec; that has now dropped to 51.5%.

The Conservatives are steadily transferring all the good jobs to other provinces with the result that Quebec will be perennially impoverished. That is the reality. After the fact, Quebec is criticized for having equalization. There should be no equalization. They should not get more. Let us leave and we will do just fine.

• (1640)

[English]

**Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to be here and would like to ask my friend a question. I know he is very passionate about issues such as this.

Indeed, as the member knows, I spent some time in a logging company some years ago in Alberta. I recently had a lumber company in northern Alberta close down as a result of obviously economic conditions that affect his province as well. That happened in High Prairie, Alberta, in my constituency, where I am going to be tomorrow and hopefully meet with some of those people who are affected by this.

As the member knows as well, Canada has one of the lowest gasoline prices in the world. It is probably because of the federal taxes that we do not apply that many countries do.

I wanted to let the member know as well that on my flight back here last weekend I had the opportunity to sit behind two full rows of people from Quebec. I flew here from Fort McMurray because that is my constituency. I had an opportunity to practice my French. There are many Quebecers in my constituency and I am very proud of that. I represent them here today and I represent them in all the things I do.

Indeed, I wonder if the member is aware as well that of the 500,000 jobs in the oil sands that have been created in this country, 16% or 80,000 of those jobs are actually in Ontario and half of them are spread out across this country and contribute tremendously to our economy.

I am also curious as to my friend's comments in relation to the budget as far as it deals with immigration. The *Winnipeg Free Press* has said:

In the years 1993-2006, the immigration backlog grew from 50,000 to 800,000. Canadians, new and old, have been offered a clear choice: Conservative policy that will benefit Canada, or politics that will benefit Liberals.

I wonder if the member is prepared to vote against such clear and decisive policy that is going to help Canadians, especially new Canadians and help our economy.

[Translation]

**Mr. Mario Laframboise:** Mr. Speaker, Athabasca is in my colleague's riding. That is where much of the oil sands development is located. I understand that he knows and can tell me where the workers in his region are from. He has told me in the past that 25,000 jobs still need to be filled in his riding. There is a shortage of the labour needed to develop the oil sands. The problem is that he is repeating what the Minister of Labour said to the citizens of his riding in the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean area, that is, that there are jobs to be had in western Canada. That is what he is doing and that is the Conservative way. He explains that jobs are being created elsewhere and, basically, he would not dare publicly say that perhaps people from Quebec should go there to work.

The goal is not to displace populations. That was already tried in previous centuries. We know that the forests will continue to grow and forest-based products will continue to sell around the world. What is important is to focus our efforts and to ensure that our businesses are modernized and able to compete on the market. This has been done in other countries, such as Ireland. This is achieved by helping businesses. The Conservative philosophy, however, as my colleague is trying to convey, is to tell people from other places to go work elsewhere in Canada. In his riding, some people come from Ontario and others from Quebec.

That is fine. All the better. But my goal in life is to ensure that the people who are in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean remain in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean and earn a living there; that those who live in the Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel riding earn a living in that region; that those who live in the Pontiac riding earn a living there; that those from the Gaspé earn a living there. That is my goal in life and what I am working for here.

Every day, like all my Bloc Québécois colleagues, I am proud to rise here to defend the interests of Quebecers and to try to ensure that wealth is distributed in a way that allows everyone to live comfortably in all areas of Quebec. My goal is not to rise here to tell people they should go work in my colleague's riding, in western Canada. That is not the objective.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague for his excellent speech and for the light he has shed on the measures that will be adopted and that are currently being debated.

Could he explain once again to this House how important it is for older workers to have access to a real assistance program after they have tried retraining measures? Could he talk about how important it is for them to receive government support so that they can retire with dignity and be compensated for their contribution to the economic development of Quebec?

• (1645)

**Mr. Mario Laframboise:** Mr. Speaker, this gives me the opportunity to say that the program for older worker adjustment, also known as POWA, was created by the federal government. Everyone will remember that it was abolished by the Liberals in 1996, but it was a good idea. When it was created, the Bloc Québécois did not exist, but it was still a good idea.

*Government Orders*

The problem is that the federal government now seems to have the money to reinstate this program and to enable all these workers who were not able to find work with another company to remain at home in their own communities, and to have a decent retirement. That was the purpose of the program for older worker adjustment created by the federal government. It provided a decent income for workers 55 and up until they reached 65 and could receive a pension, if they were unable to find a new job or to be placed with another company.

The goal was to enable these workers to stay at home, in their region, in their community. Today, the Conservatives are saying that Canada is big and people can move if they want to continue to work. That is the message they are sending. The Bloc will continue to speak out against this, every day, as long as we are able to.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague. The budget includes, in my opinion, a slightly insidious measure, which would give the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration discretionary power. That is dangerous. That could lead to abuse because she could choose which immigrants are admitted into Canada and when.

Could my colleague explain what exactly the Bloc Québécois is worried about in this measure that we are unfortunately not able to debate more fully?

**Mr. Mario Laframboise:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Beauharnois—Salaberry for that very pertinent question.

This has always been a dream of the Conservatives, and they are starting to try to make that dream a reality. I listened to what the Prime Minister said about immigrants when he was leader of the opposition and a member representing the Canadian Alliance. He said that the process would have to be controlled and that immigrants would have to be selected. Through the minister's office, he is trying to control who comes here, what they do and where they come from. He is trying to exert political control.

This control, the Conservatives' shameful way of wanting to control everything, is not surprising, coming from the Prime Minister. Even the members and the ministers are subject to this control. It should therefore come as no surprise that they want to control immigrants. The problem is that they cannot control everyone. In any case, they will not control the Bloc Québécois members, who will oppose these measures.

One thing that is surprising is that the Liberals seem very upset about this measure. I cannot wait to see how they vote. In theory, they should vote against this budget measure, but I have the feeling that they will once again find some way to remain seated, hide, lie down or do whatever. We shall see.

Once again, this is a roundabout way to get a measure adopted. This has been going on for several weeks. All the experts are saying that this clause should have been removed from this bill and placed in a separate bill that could have been analysed separately in committee, with witnesses and everything. The Conservatives chose to slip this measure into the budget. They knew the Liberals would let it through.

Once again, this is not good for the future or for Canada's image. It is certainly not the image Quebecers would project if they had their own country, Quebec.

[English]

**Hon. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Vancouver Centre.

I rise today to speak to Bill C-50 the budget Implementation act, 2008. Specifically, I will be addressing the amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act contained therein.

At the heart of Canadian immigration policy is the idea of family reunification. This concept is based on the belief that Canadians should have the opportunity to be close to their families, regardless of their country of origin. About half of the residents of my riding of Bramalea—Gore—Malton were born outside of this country. Immigrants are proud Canadians who made the decision to come to our great country to start a new life.

They have made their homes here and naturally want their families to share in their success. I am a proud immigrant, having come to Canada in 1975 as a member of the family class.

The amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act contained in Bill C-50 threaten to dismantle the immigration system that has made Canada the diverse and prosperous nation it is today. By giving the minister the unilateral ability to cherry-pick desirable applicants from the immigration queue, this bill rejects the principles of compassion, fairness and equality on which our immigration system and society as a whole is based.

The public knows that this government does not take seriously the challenges facing recent immigrants to Canada. The government is \$100 million behind on its payments under the Canada-Ontario immigration agreement. It also scrapped its plan to create a Canadian agency for assessment and recognition of foreign credentials, instead establishing an office which does little more than refer new Canadians to provincial offices where the real work happens.

This legislation does nothing to address the needs of recent immigrants struggling to find work in their fields of expertise. What is the point of accepting more skilled immigrants if they are barred from finding work in their fields when they get here?

The minister claims these changes are necessary to reduce the existing application backlog, but immigration lawyers, rights advocates and ordinary Canadians are skeptical. Based on past statements from members of the government, they are right to be suspicious of the motives behind these amendments.

In 2007 the Prime Minister said:

You have to remember that west of Winnipeg the ridings the Liberals hold are dominated by people who are either recent Asian immigrants or recent migrants from Eastern Canada; people who live in ghettos and are not integrated into Western Canadian society.

Even worse, in the Reform Party's 1988 election platform, the Prime Minister wrote that immigration should not "radically or suddenly alter the ethnic makeup of Canada".



*Government Orders*

Finally, the Conservative member for Calgary Northeast has been quoted by the Canadian Press as saying, "Immigrants are choking welfare systems, contributing to high unemployment, and many cannot read".

These are shocking and ignorant statements that shed light on the Conservative government's true beliefs about immigration. It would be unthinkable to give such extraordinary powers to an immigration minister who refuses to reject these views.

This bill pairs the government's lack of respect for immigrants with its rejection of Canada's democratic traditions. The government's attempt to pass these amendments in secret is just the latest in a series of anti-democratic tricks, including instructing committee chairs to walk out of meetings to block votes and proposing a seat redistribution formula that cheats Ontario out of half of the seats it should receive based on its population. The government clearly does not respect Canada's democratic norms and neither does this bill.

• (1650)

The changes proposed in this bill go against the core principles upon which Canadian immigration policy is based. Immigration policy must be predictable, compassionate and fair.

By amending section 11 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act to say that an immigration official "may" issue a visa to an applicant if the applicant meets the stated requirements, instead of that the officer "shall" grant the visa, the door would be opened for the minister to issue directives to reject visas to applicants from certain groups, regardless of whether or not those applicants are indeed qualified to visit or immigrate to Canada.

Under the proposed changes to section 25 of the act, the minister would be given similar power relating to applications made on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. The right of applicants to have their applications processed would be removed and, as a result, so would the right to an appeal: if an application is not processed, then there is no decision to appeal. If the minister decides not to process applications for members of a certain group, they would have no right to appeal that decision even if they applied on humanitarian and compassionate grounds.

However, the most worrying part of these proposals is the amendment to section 87, which establishes the concept of instructions. This amendment would grant the minister the ability to declare new rules for visa applicants and prospective immigrants without advance notice or public debate.

The minister would be able to create new categories of applications, which would then be given priority or rejected outright. The way in which these amendments have been presented to the House raises worries that instructions from the minister would be given in a similarly secretive fashion. There would be nothing to stop the minister from publishing sweeping changes in the *Canada Gazette* under the cover of darkness, with the government hoping no one notices until it is too late.

The amendments contained in Bill C-50 would severely damage Canada's immigration system and lay waste to our tradition of family reunification as a key part of immigration policy. These amendments would do nothing to improve the lives of new immigrants who are

unable to find jobs in their fields despite having all the necessary skills and qualifications.

Finally, the way in which these changes have been brought forward and the unnecessary powers they would grant to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration make a mockery of the idea of accountability and transparency in the government's decision making process. Rule by decree is not compatible with Canada's democratic tradition. Neither is the government's attempt to bury these changes in a budget bill instead of proposing them for debate as a separate immigration bill.

People from around the world want to live and work in Canada because of our reputation for tolerance and democracy. The government has shown that it does not respect Canada's democracy, and with this bill has proven that it does not respect immigrants either. Shame on the minister and shame on the government.

• (1655)

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have a comment and a question for the member. I am not sure how he indicates that this is not receiving appropriate attention and is coming in the back door somehow. Obviously it is up for debate in this House, as it should be, in public and in the open where we can do that. It will go to committee. Not only will it be in committee to have further witnesses called and material presented, but it will come back to the House again for debate and, eventually, a vote.

The big question is how the member will be voting when the bill comes before the House. Will he be opposing it if he believes that it is inappropriate, given the fact that it was under 13 years of his government, six ministers and four terms in office that nothing was done to reform the system in all those years? Numbers grew from 50,000 to 800,000. Surely being 800,000 plus one coming into the system will not make it faster or easier.

What does he have against a system that will be more efficient and faster and which will encourage family reunification on a quick basis and bring skilled people to the trades that so desperately need them to build our country?

• (1700)

**Hon. Gurbax Malhi:** Mr. Speaker, the chair of the immigration section of the Canadian Bar Association is quoted in today's *Toronto Star* as saying this about the amendments proposed in this bill:

We fail to see why these are necessary to achieve the government's aims...The system should be transparent. It shouldn't operate by ministerial fiat. And that's what we're talking about here, a kind of decree system.

Worryingly, the minister is out of ideas and is trying to centralize power in her own office, just like the Prime Minister has done with his cabinet. This is the wrong approach. It is in complete opposition to Canadian values.

*Government Orders*

One thing is clear. The Conservative approach of shutting the door on immigrants by simply reducing the number of applications the federal government accepts is the wrong way to address the immigration backlog. The minister wants to have the sole power to say who gets—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** It is with regret that I interrupt the hon. member, but the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay is very anxious to ask his question.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I was actually fascinated by the member's response, because he used the words "the need for fair and transparent", yet that is in the NDP motion. We find that this backdoor attempt, as he talked about, to bring in this immigration bill under a budget is wrong. It is not how things are done. The NDP has put forward before the House a very clear issue to be debated. I was actually quite surprised earlier on when he accused the government of not having respect for democracy and immigrants and said shame on the government.

I do not know how he squares it with his constituents, but when I go back to my constituents, I tell them the reason that I get \$150,000 a year, or whatever it is that we are being paid now, is so that I will stand up and vote on difficult issues. At certain times there will be issues that might not always be popular, but I will always be able to go back to my constituents. If my constituents believe strongly in an issue and want me to vote for or against something, I am here to represent them. I am not here to just sit in a seat and read whatever prepared text is handed to me by the Liberal backroom.

If the member has such problems with this, and if he says this is a shameful action, it does not respect democracy and it is not respectful of immigrants, then how can he sit there collecting a paycheque and support it? Does he not understand that being respectful of democracy is being respectful enough to stand up and vote against something if the member is opposed to it?

Will he support this motion—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** The hon. member for Bramalea—Gore—Malton has one minute to respond.

**Hon. Gurbax Malhi:** Mr. Speaker, if you check my previous voting record from 1993 you will see I work for my constituents. When they send me emails—

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** How will you vote?

**Hon. Gurbax Malhi:** I do that all the time. I do that all the time when I am sent the emails and when the issues come up.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** How will you vote?

**Hon. Gurbax Malhi:** Have you checked my voting record? I am not like you. I do that all the time.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** The hon. member has just expressed his experience in the House and has sufficient experience to know that when referring to other members, it is in the third person, not the second person. The only person who is addressed in the second person is the Chair.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Vancouver Centre.

**Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I stand here because I take great exception to this particular piece of the finance bill. First and foremost, I call this governing by stealth. This

is a substantive change to the way that the immigration act is going to work. It is a substantive change in the process. This piece of legislation should have gone to the right committee. The right committee, with the expertise and the experience, is the immigration committee.

The bill could have come in the way bills like this one should always come in. This should come in as an immigration amendment, as part of the immigration changes being made by the government. It should be spoken to in the House and then go to the appropriate committee, which would be the immigration committee. The immigration committee, with all of its expertise, should talk to people around the country and find out how they want to deal with it.

Putting the bill in the House right at this moment and sticking immigration reforms into a confidence bill on finance is really the kind of thing that we have come to expect from the Conservative government. The government is all about stealth in changing things and about getting its way.

True, there is a little bit of money involved in this bill, so I want to make a second point. The minister is putting \$30 million into the bill and expects us to believe that this is going to change the backlog of applications that the minister says she needs to deal with.

The Liberal minister of immigration in the previous government put in \$700 million, a process and a plan just before the election. The minister had gone through with contracting out the process for the purpose of decreasing the backlog.

I have no idea what happened to that plan. It had already started. Much of the contracting had been done. It was accepted by cabinet and by the department. What happened to it? What happened to the \$700 million? Now we hear that the \$700 million has been replaced by \$30 million and the government has no plan.

Giving unprecedented power to a minister to make decisions that override the process, that break all the rules and that have no accountability, is an absolutely atrocious way to conduct government. It is undemocratic. It ignores Parliament and the parliamentary committees that have the expertise. It ignores information on the issue that might make it work if, as the minister says, her objective is to bring down the backlog. This bill does none of that.

This legislation removes the current process entirely. We do not know how the minister is going to choose people, and she does not have to tell us. She can make choices about who comes into the country and who does not come into the country, and she can do this with a sweep of a pen. She has no requirement to tell anybody her reasonings. This is kind of sad, which is the best word I can find.

By the year 2011 Canada will be dependent on immigration for 100% of its net labour force. Why? Because we are not having babies. Canada's birth rate is negative. Our aging population is well over 65 and no longer in the workforce. Canada can never be a productive and competitive nation if we do not have people available to work.

It is obvious that immigration is of seminal importance to the economy of this country and of seminal importance to the future of this country, its whole social infrastructure and the way that we always set values in a country like ours. Canada was built on immigrants, other than the aboriginal people who were the first peoples of this nation and who opened the doors to immigration, against their better judgment.

We came from every country of the world, originally from Europe. Many people came here seeking a better life, seeking to fulfill their dreams of freedom. They wanted their children to grow up in a country of opportunity. They came from everywhere in the world and built a nation. We continue to build this nation on the backs of immigrants, which is an appropriate thing to do, because we are a new world nation, so to speak.

• (1705)

Many of the first wave of immigrants who came here from Europe should feel concerned about the bill. They will remember that they were denied entrance into this country on fairly basic reasons, like the region they came from, where they originally belonged and that their values were different from certain European values.

The Chinese will tell us that for 25 years they were a bachelor community because they were not allowed to bring over their wives and children. We heard a member of the House talk about the *Komagata Maru*. We heard another member speak to the *St. Louis*, which was turned away because the Jews from Europe tried to come here, seeking to flee Nazi Germany, and they were turned back on a whim, on an ideology.

We no longer live in that kind of country. We live in a country where there must be clear and transparent rules so people who wish to come to this country know those rules and know when they can and cannot come here. They need to know whether they fulfill the requirements, based on a hope that they can pass the security requirements, to come here. They did come and they have continued to come to build a nation.

It is true that many of our new immigrants come from Asia and Africa and they, too, are bringing with them expertise. Fifty-one per cent of our new immigrants have post-secondary education and a diploma. However, only 22% of Canadians who were born and live in Canada can boast about having a post-secondary degree or a diploma of any kind.

We are bringing in people who can contribute to this country because we need a workforce for our productivity and competitiveness. We need to remember that this country was built by immigrants who were seeking to contribute to it and to have a better life. They brought with them their families because families create stability. A nation is built when people put down roots and a nation continues to be built, not by temporary workers, but by people who come here with their families and who invest their hopes, their dreams, their hard work and their loyalty in Canada. Our great nation has become what it is today because of those people.

I do not understand how we can give the minister the unprecedented power to decide who will or will not come here without having to give any reasons. The minister is asking us to trust her because she will do the right thing.

### *Government Orders*

We have seen time and time again that we cannot trust the government. I would say that most cynical Canadians would say that they cannot trust any particular government, but that is not the point. The point is that this is why we have bureaucracies, processes and clear ways of doing things.

At the same time, this would close the door to our newest immigrants, those who have come from Asia and Africa, on a whim, and it would close the door to their bringing in their families. Only letting people in for economic reasons seems, from the beginning of time, to be the Conservative ideology. Mr. Diefenbaker did that a long time ago and Mr. Mulroney wanted to change immigration so that it would only be economic migrants coming here.

To build a nation we need to bring a mix of people into this country to put down roots and to work, but they need to bring with them their families. If we decide to only bring people here because of the work they can do and ignore their families, we will be back to what the Chinese remembered.

We have heard the government apologize and give redress but when we apologize and give redress we are supposed to have learned a lesson and will not do it again. If we put in place all of the protocols that would make that happen again, then we have learned nothing and the redress and the apology become hollow.

I am suggesting that we need to debate the issue of changes in immigration in the appropriate bill and in the appropriate place, which is the immigration committee, and not to run it through under the radar screen as the government is trying to do. I call that governing by stealth.

• (1710)

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I cannot imagine how the hon. member comes to say that we are governing by stealth. This is an opportunity for her and members opposite to speak in the House and in committee. When the bill is passed, it will give the opportunity for the minister to issue an instruction that will be broad and in accordance with the goals set out by the Government of Canada. She will not be involved in individual decision making. That will be left to the department.

The instructions will be open, transparent and published in the *Canada Gazette*. The annual report will come back to Parliament and, ultimately, it will be this House that decides, with responsibility to the Canadian people, whether or not the legislation passes.

Once again, the government is doing something about a backlog that increased under that member's government from 50,000 to over 800,000. To be 800,001 does not help if people want to come into this country to reunite with their family or be a skilled worker.

Will the member stand up in the House and oppose this legislation, given her democratic right and representation that she has to her constituents and to those across the country who want to see reform and want to see it go in the fashion we are proposing?

*Government Orders*

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member just let his hidden agenda become not so hidden when he said “in the fashion in which we are proposing”. In other words, he wants it done in the way his government wants it to be done without any real debate. The government sticks it into a vehicle that makes it impossible for people to say “no” because it could bring the government down.

Parliament needs to be respected, and we respect Parliament not by trickery, but by having a real debate and real discussion and everyone can understand the results. Therefore, getting in the hon. member's way and the government opposite's way by stealth is not a democratic way to go nor an appropriate way to go. It does not do justice to good public policy.

• (1715)

**Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I certainly agree with the Conservatives in one sense. Some of the problems we are dealing with today, like the huge backlog, are as a result of Liberal cutbacks. We go back to the mid-nineties when the government of the day made such sweeping changes and cuts we lost a whole decade of innovative changes and immigration was certainly front and centre.

However, I agree with the Liberals and I agree with the member when she said that this was outrageous, that it removes the process, that with the sweep of a pen the minister can change the face of this country, that she can deny families from coming in, that the government will be able to distort the mix of people coming in, that it will ruin the diversity of this nation, that it will wreck the history of this country, and on and on she went.

If it is that clear for them, which I believe it is, then they have a choice. They can either vote with the government, as they are intending to do, at least based on the statements to date, and they can support the government's agenda, which will destroy the face of this country and our open immigration process, or they can continue to twist and turn and refuse to participate in a process when they have an opportunity to make a difference.

If the member believes in process and in discussion by committee, will she join with us and support our amendment which will remove this section from the budget implementation bill and allow for full and open discussions on immigration policy?

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** The hon. member for Vancouver Centre has one minute to respond.

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member says that we should just go ahead and vote and not sit on our hands. The point is that if we believe in process, we believe in appropriate process and this is not appropriate process. This is chicanery. This is trickery. This is the kind of stuff that we will not play a role in by acknowledging that it is so and therefore standing up and voting yea or nay against it. That is something that we refuse to do on this side of the House because it demeans Parliament and we will not play a role in demeaning Parliament with trickery.

The hon. member mentioned that the backlog came from the Liberals and that this was all because of cutting immigration in the beginning. It is so usual for the members in that party not to understand basic economics, that when there is a \$43 billion deficit left by the—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** I regret that I must interrupt the hon. member but I had given her fair notice that it would be for one minute.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River has the floor for 20 minutes, of which there will only be 10 minutes today.

**Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to engage in debate on this budget implementation bill.

Budget implementation bills are usually pretty complex and technical things at the best of times, and most Canadians will appreciate that this bill is of that nature. However, what has happened in this particular bill, for reasons that I do not think have been adequately explained in the House by the government, is that it has buried in the middle of this bill a provision dealing with the Immigration Act and it proposes changes to how the immigration flow is managed. I found that quite odd.

Someone here suggested that the proposals are secret. The government members have said that they are not secret, that they are right there in the bill that Parliament will have a chance to debate and pass.

The problem is that the provisions of the bill allow for the creation of what are called instructions that will be given by the minister. The perception is that it is those instructions, not the provisions of the bill, that will be “secret”; that the instructions will not be seen until they hit the street. They are supposed to be published in the *Canada Gazette* but we are not clear and even I as a member am not clear at this moment whether we are able to see all of the rules governing immigration.

I put a notice of motion for the production of papers on the order paper this week so I could see the Immigration Control Manual, a document that, unbelievably, has been revoked from the public. It is no longer available. I want to see this document but the Conservative government has pulled it from public access.

That is not transparent. That is operating by stealth. That is just a bit of a sidebar because the real issue here is what the government plans to do with these so-called instructions. This, by itself, is a departure.

It is true that under the Income Tax Act there is a provision that allows for the issuance of guidelines. However, I think taxpayers and most Canadians will appreciate that in the Income Tax Act there is a lot of complexity. A whole industry of tax lawyers is out there manoeuvring 25 hours a day to deal with the Income Tax Act in all its complexity. Therefore, we have accepted, in Parliament, that there can be guidelines issued by the minister.

However, in the Immigration Act, the government, quite a novel suggestion, has decided that it will create this category of instructions and they will simply be sent out.

*Government Orders*

The reason why, in rule of law, we object to that is that we never get a chance to see them, review them, verify them or validate them. If the government had chosen to make regulations containing these instructions, then we could see them as regulations. They would be pre-published for consultation in the *Canada Gazette*, be adopted in the usual way and then would stand referred to the Standing Committee for Scrutiny of Regulations where they would be reviewed for legality and constitutionality.

The government has not even done that in this case. It has simply said that it will create a category of instructions that will simply be logged out there to all the immigration officers around the world and they will operate based on those instructions.

Many of us here in Parliament are concerned that these instructions will be arbitrary and may get into an area which has been fought for centuries by the Westminster Parliament, a category of executive branch activity we call the pretended power of dispensation. What that means is that Parliament will pass a law and then the King says that he will make a regulation under the law. The King then purports to grant an exemption, a dispensation from the law, from the regulation. Parliament has always told the King that he cannot do that because there is no power of dispensation and no power of exemption. Parliament has said that when it writes a law, it is the law for everybody.

• (1720)

What if the government begins to build into these instructions dispensations? In other words, one instruction says that ABC shall prevail, but the minister may exempt or an immigration officer may exempt. What if some of these exemptions involve receipt of political favours or giving of political favours or money, God forbid? It is a whole area where we do not want to go. The government is apparently authorizing this in this bill.

In fairness to the government, it says it is trying to fix this problem of backlog under the immigration act. The backlog is a bit of an issue, but I suggest to the House that the 800,000 person backlog is not such a bad thing. It is actually an asset.

If we had no backlog in our immigration program, we would say our immigration program was a failure. We have to have an inventory of immigrants coming here. The backlog is on average only two and a half years worth of immigrants. As other colleagues have pointed out, we need a strong, vibrant immigration program. We like to have a lineup. It is not just one lineup. The immigration queue or the 800,000 person backlog is about six lineups.

There is a special lineup for family class-spousal. That lineup only takes six months to a year. Then the rest of the family class, including parents, in some countries can go up to seven years.

Then we have skilled workers. Some of those skilled workers can take up to seven years. If the person is a skilled worker, provincial nominee class, that person can be here within months. Then we have investors, refugee class, humanitarian class and the inland processing.

All of these are different lineups. There is not one 800,000 person lineup out there. There are half a dozen at least. The average inventory wait is two and a half years, but I do say that having a family member having to wait seven years is far too long.

The reason why that has happened, of course, is that we have decided the policy as a country, that we want the intake every year to be balanced between economic class and family class: 60% economic class and that is skilled workers, investors, et cetera, and 40% family class. That is why each of our offices has to stream these lines, so that the intake of immigrants to Canada is 60% economic each year and 40% family class.

I do think we have to fix this. We do not want to raise unrealistic expectations that we can get rid of the backlog of 800,000 persons overnight. If we did that we would not have any inventory. We would not have anyone in the lineup. There would be no one coming.

What we have to do is to find a way to manage the longer lineups to ensure that people in them know how long is involved and that they are not unduly extended way beyond times. Some parents I have seen go from being in good health at age 63 and in seven years they are up to 70 years of age, and they fall into bad health and their immigration application is prejudiced as a result.

This is a problem we simply must deal with. I am not sure that by criticizing the backlog day in and day out that we do service to the immigration program the way it is.

I want to also talk about the importance of viewing the immigration backlog as a symptom of a positive immigration program.

I have heard words in this House that say that under the Conservative government the number of immigrants has been increased to the highest level, if not ever, at least in recent memory. I think that is a bit disingenuous. It is fairly clear from the numbers that the number of visas issued for immigrants over the last couple of years has been about the same as it was under the previous government.

Every year the immigration department issues about 250,000 to 275,000 immigration visas of all the classes I mentioned earlier: the family class, the skilled worker class, the investor class and the humanitarian class.

• (1725)

What the government has done in this case is it has taken the student visas which are not immigrant visas, and it has taken work visas which are not immigrant visas and it has added them in to say, "Look, we have got 400,000 immigrants". That is not a fair figure. That is not a fair way to do it. It is misleading. If we are going to get increases in our immigration intake, let us get a real intake.

Mr. Speaker, you are signaling that I am near the end of my 11 minutes. I look forward to finishing the balance of my remarks at a later date.

*Private Members' Business*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** When we next return to the study of Bill C-50, the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River will have 10 more minutes.

It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

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## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

● (1730)

[*Translation*]

### FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ)** moved that Bill C-517, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (mandatory labelling for genetically modified foods), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is with emotion and pleasure that I speak to you and my colleagues in this House to express my point of view on genetically modified foods.

I would ask for your indulgence as I make a brief aside in my speech to commend two young people in my riding, Claire and Norbert. On December 11, they sent me an email, which I have before me, encouraging me to ensure mandatory labelling of genetically modified foods. Claire and Norbert even called me at my office and, together with their teacher, Marcel Parizeau—whom I salute this evening—invited me to discuss this with them. This was a very pleasant meeting. To my great surprise—you too will be surprised, Mr. Speaker—Claire and Norbert, who I met with at the Coeur à Coeur alternative school in Saint Eustache, are roughly 12 years old. I was surprised that young people that age had concerns about the food they eat.

I would also like to pay tribute to and thank my friend from Brossard—La Prairie, for supporting this bill.

Bill C-517 before us this evening is not an original bill. This is a topic that has been dear to the Bloc Québécois for many years. The hon. member for Drummond, in 1993 and 1994, had concerns about genetically modified foods. In 1999, my friend, Hélène Alarie—who is surely watching me this evening because I told her I was going to talk about this—tabled a bill in this House. By the way, Hélène was the first female certified agronomist in Canada. Ms. Alarie could speak at length about genetically modified organisms. I salute you, Hélène.

In 2001, an hon. Liberal member, Mr. Ciaccia—if my memory serves me correctly—tabled a bill calling on the government for mandatory labelling of genetically modified foods.

The summary of this bill reads:

This enactment amends the Food and Drugs Act to make the Minister of Health responsible for establishing that a food or one or more of its components has been genetically modified. If it is established that a food or one or more of its components has been genetically modified, the Minister shall cause the name of the food to be published in the Canada Gazette. The Minister shall also prepare a list of all such foods and cause a copy to be sent at no cost to any one who requests it.

No one may sell this food or a food product containing this food in a package unless a label is affixed to the package containing the following notice:

This product or one or more of its components has been genetically modified—

In addition, no one may sell this food or a food product containing this food in a package unless a poster in the prescribed form has been placed near the food containing the following notice:

Genetically modified—

● (1735)

The main goal of this bill is not to put genetically modified foods on trial, but to inform consumers about what they are eating and to give them a choice between consuming genetically modified foods or not. That is a democratic choice.

This is bound to be a very popular bill, and I invite all members of this House to read their local papers to find out what is going on and what their constituents want. Between 79% and 90% of Canadians—the average is 83%—want foods containing genetically modified organisms to be labelled. In the Quebec nation, 86% of people want labelling, and 80% of agricultural producers support implementing mandatory labelling standards. In my youth, there was a saying that went “What the people want, God wants”. I would amend that by saying that what the people want, we, their elected representatives, want. This is what we, their elected representatives, want.

Another very important aspect of labelling is food safety. As a result of globalization—and we have examples—any type of food product can be found on our grocery store shelves and consumers may not know what it contains. For instance, there were cases of toothpaste that contained antifreeze. We must be careful. Therefore, there is also the issue of food safety. Given the lack of information about the medium- and long-term effects of GMOs, it is only natural to have concerns. You surely have concerns about the long-term effects, as I do.

In order to approve a transgenic product, the federal government relies on studies made by companies, which I will not mention, and merely reviews them. It does not conduct a systematic second assessment of all the plants and foods that are put on the market. Consequently, there is very little public or independent expertise in the evaluation of transgenic foods. The approval process must be more accessible and transparent in order to help the public better understand the risks and benefits associated with GMOs.

In March 2004, the government established a voluntary and ambiguous labelling policy.

● (1740)

It is so ambiguous that no foods on our store shelves are labelled to indicate whether or not they contain GMOs. There are none; we can find none. The policy is so confusing, everything is so mixed up that it would be too complicated. If there are no genetically modified organisms in the food, the producer should not have any trouble labelling it. However, the voluntary labelling system is so complicated and confusing that no one even wants to start the process.

In four years, the voluntary labelling program has failed to yield any results. None. In September 2003, after four years of consultations, the Canadian General Standards Board published voluntary labelling rules for products containing GMOs. I will repeat that it was a compromise, a complex and unclear system of labelling, left to the discretion of the industry and, above all, not suited to the needs of consumers.

We have witnessed a part of history in the last couple of years. I would like to talk about José Bové, the Frenchman—as he is called—who spoke out against GMOs. After many battles, Mr. Bové was able to get France to ban all GMOs for human consumption. And so it started.

Mr. Bové served three or four months in prison. He has done it all. He had the nerve to destroy entire crops, but he won. Europe is currently looking at the possibility of banning any food destined for human or animal consumption that contains GMOs—genetically modified organisms.

What I find surprising is that only Canada, the United States and New Zealand have yet to take this position. Why are European countries and other countries throughout the world completely opposed to genetically modified organisms?

One benefit of labelling GMOs is that consumers will have relevant information about the products they are consuming, so that they can make an informed decision, a cultural decision, a personal decision or a religious decision. It is up to agricultural producers to ensure they have access to the markets by complying with the current national and international standards. This would open up the European market to wheat producers.

What is a GMO? All living organisms have a multitude of genes that determine the colour and shape of their fruits and leaves. A GMO is a living organism to which has been added one or more genes to give it a special characteristic. For example—

• (1745)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** It is with regret that I must interrupt the hon. member, but his time has expired. I tried to catch his eye, but he was too immersed in his speech.

The hon. member for Simcoe North has the floor for questions and comments.

[*English*]

**Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the member's presentation. I fully admit that Canadian consumers are very interested in food labelling and the importance of it as it relates to information that helps them make their choices about food.

Some 50 products have been approved by Health Canada and have gone through rigorous assessments in terms of their health safety. Only when these assessments have been completed will those products go on the market. Why should the member be concerned that these GM products need some additional labelling?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. If I am not mistaken, he attended this

*Private Members' Business*

afternoon's meeting of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. It was his first time present, and he did well.

It is a bit like hiding one's head in the sand. How can we trust them, if it has been proven by departments and by everyone that the government does not have the means or methods for verification. It trusts the methods of companies like Monsanto, and looks only to see if the tests appear valid. That is crazy. We do not get a second opinion, no second opinion at all. We have to blindly trust the industry. Can we actually trust them?

Remember that the former U.S. Secretary of Agriculture said that the enormous pressure was put on him to approve genetically modified products. Even President Bush was pressured to accept GMOs.

Mr. Speaker, I am sorry, but I get very passionate whenever it comes time to—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** The hon. member for West Nova for questions and comments.

**Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased that the hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles is presenting such a bill. Doing so demonstrates the maturity of the Bloc Québécois.

We must recognize that in order to protect Canadians, we need to have a strong, central government. The central government can tell merchants and retailers in the provinces, like Quebec, what must be found on the shelves, what must be displayed to inform citizens. It can go even further and tell them what language and even what words must be used—the specific nomenclature that must be used.

This is a acknowledgement of federalism, a recognition of Canada, and I congratulate him wholeheartedly.

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** Mr. Speaker,—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** The hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles must first realize that when the Speaker rises, he must wait.

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** Mr. Speaker, my dear friend, I apologize.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** Then he will have 90 seconds to respond to these comments. Then the axe will fall.

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** Mr. Speaker, my dear friend, you just took some of my time.

I would like to respond to my colleague that it is not a question of sovereignty. It is a question of human well-being. Since 2001, Ontario has been calling for labelling. British Columbia and Quebec have also been calling for labelling. It falls under federal jurisdiction, so we must take care of it.

This does not mean that the government is running smoothly. This means that it is not running smoothly. The Conservatives are not doing their job, which is to take care of mandatory labelling.

• (1750)

**Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary for Health, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are here today to discuss a private member's bill, Bill C-517, which was recently tabled in the House.

*Private Members' Business*

[English]

Bill C-517 proposes amendments to the Food and Drugs Act in order to require the mandatory labelling of all foods derived from a genetically modified organism or containing an ingredient derived from a genetically modified organism.

First of all, let me remind the House that Health Canada is responsible for ensuring that all foods, including foods derived from genetically modified organisms, are safe prior to entering the Canadian food system.

I would like to point out that this bill provides a narrower definition of genetically modified food than that which already exists under division 28 of the Food and Drugs Act, also referred to as the novel foods regulations.

Under division 28, "genetically modify" includes modifications obtained through the use of more traditional techniques, such as chemical mutagenesis and conventional breeding, as well as those obtained from modern biotechnology.

Health Canada regulates genetically modified foods as novel foods. The Food and Drugs Act and regulations have defined the concept of "novel food" to include those products derived through specific genetic modification.

This concept also encompasses foods that may have undergone a significant change in composition or nutritional value as a result of a manufacturing or packaging process, or any substance that does not have a history of safe use as a food.

The novel foods regulations permit Health Canada to assess the safety of all novel foods, irrespective of the method used for their development prior to their sale in Canada. Only after a novel food is determined safe for human consumption is it allowed to be sold on the Canadian market.

I would like to stress that amendments to the Food and Drugs Act as proposed in Bill C-517 would create a two tier system for genetically modified foods.

Depending on the method used in the development of the specific food, foods falling under the new definition would be required to be labelled to indicate the method of production, while others derived from more traditional modification methods, such as mutagenesis, would not be subject to mandatory labelling.

We have a rigorous process in Canada. Novel foods regulations require that Health Canada be notified prior to the marketing of any novel food in Canada so that a thorough safety assessment can be performed for each product.

The basis of these assessments by Health Canada scientists is a comparison of each novel food with a conventional counterpart and requires a critical evaluation of the scientific information and results of research studies provided in accordance with Health Canada requirements.

The information requirements are comprehensive. Typically, they include a complete description of the food product, its intended use, a molecular characterization of any novel traits, biochemical and compositional analysis, toxicological, nutritional and allergenicity

data, and an estimate of dietary exposure and anticipated use patterns by the average consumer, including population subgroups where applicable.

The requirements are laid out in the Health Canada publication entitled "Guidelines for the Safety Assessment of Novel Foods". These guidelines were recently updated following public consultation.

The guidelines were revised to provide more detailed information about the pre-market notification procedure for novel foods in Canada, to provide more explicit guidance on the safety assessment data requirements for different types of novel foods, and to reflect advances in science and technology.

The revised guidelines are also consistent with guidance documents developed at the international level with respect to the assessment of genetically modified foods.

• (1755)

[Translation]

The Government of Canada believes that protecting the health of humans and of Canada's environment is the primary consideration of the regulatory system.

[English]

As I have mentioned before, only those foods demonstrated to be safe for human consumption are permitted into the market place.

This bill calls on the Minister of Health to maintain a list of all genetically modified foods, publish the list in the *Canada Gazette*, and post it on the Internet so anyone who requests it can see it.

This requirement is unnecessary as Health Canada already publishes a list of approved novel foods and decision documents which describe how regulatory authorities determined the safety of each new product and why certain conclusions were reached. It is all on the website.

Also available on Health Canada's website are decision summaries for each new product, the new novel foods regulations and guidelines, along with fact sheets and answers to frequently asked questions to aid in understanding this subject.

The Government of Canada is committed to sharing information with Canadians on how it regulates products of biotechnology.

In addition, Health Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, or CFIA, have launched a project to post information about products that are under review on the CFIA website.

As part of this notices of submission project, the public is provided with an opportunity to provide input on scientific matters relevant to the safety assessment of submissions from certain product developers who have requested safety assessments of novel foods or plants with novel traits.

Scientific questions or information is forwarded to Health Canada and CFIA evaluators for consideration in the assessment.

[Translation]

The subject of the bill is food labelling.



*Private Members' Business*

[English]

In Canada food labelling policies at the federal level are a shared responsibility of Health Canada and CFIA under the Food and Drugs Act.

Health Canada's responsibilities for food labelling fall within the department's mandate for health and safety issues. With respect to genetically modified foods, as with all foods, Health Canada's role is to identify the information required on the label of that food to ensure safe use.

Health Canada would determine what type of information is needed on the label to inform Canadians about these changes in the food. For example, in cases where the final food product has been intentionally modified in composition, such as increasing the level of a particular acid in canola oil, a different common name will be required to describe the oil.

Special labelling is required if changes occurred in the food that the consumer needs to be informed of for health and safety reasons, such as major compositional or nutritional changes.

[Translation]

Once again, genetically modified foods cannot be sold in Canada unless it has been proven that they are safe to eat.

[English]

Special labelling would not be used in place of a thorough safety assessment.

Apart from safety concerns, there are important trade issues that need to be looked at. Mandatory labelling would be required for genetically modified foods where safety concerns such as allergies and compositional or nutritional changes are identified. The labelling would be required to alert consumers in any case and the statements could not be misleading.

Let me say that mandatory labelling would require that all parts of the production chain participate, regardless of the nature of the products or consumer preferences. This would have major trade implications and costs.

● (1800)

[Translation]

**Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise in this House and take part in this extremely important debate. First, I would like to congratulate the two members who spoke before me and added much to the debate. I would also like to congratulate the Parliamentary Secretary for Health on the quality of his French, which is steadily improving and which he is using more and more. I do have some concerns, however, about some of what he said.

I agree with him that Health Canada is doing a very good job of making sure that the foods on the Canadian market are safe and meet the highest international scientific standards, even though mistakes can occur. Some will say, however, that even with these assessments, genetically modified organisms can negatively impact Canadians' health, especially because we do not know how they interact with one another in growing children. It will take someone who knows

more about organic biology or organic chemistry than I do to determine who is right.

What we can do is deal with what comes under our responsibility. In that regard, I agree with the member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles that if consumers and parents are informed, they can make decisions they deem appropriate, in light of information and instructions they can follow. It is true that we are seeing young people in our schools who are taking an interest in these issues and discussing them.

There are some problems, however. The parliamentary secretary raised some valid points. In Canada, there are already about 50 genetically modified products on the market that have been approved, are in circulation and can be consumed on their own or are used to produce another food. This can present problems when it comes to marketing products and also for parents or consumers, who need to know the level of risk. Solutions to these problems must be found.

I support the member's bill because I agree with its purpose. It may yet be amended, but I believe that the member has to table this kind of bill in the House because of certain things the government has done. Like the member who spoke before me, I was once the parliamentary secretary for health. I had to explain which measures the government took and why the government did not decide to impose labelling. Even so, that is no reason not to consider it in the future.

[English]

That being said, we have to recognize that there are some problems in the food chain. If we say that all products that have genetically modified components in them must be labelled, we would be labelling so much on the shelves of our stores that the labelling would become meaningless. Canola oil is a GMO and it is omnipresent in the production of other foods. In the instance of aquaculture it may be that the entrance part of the feed, being an animal or plant, was partly produced using some GMO that might be one-thousandth of one per cent.

If that is not defined in the regulations, then that can become a problem, in that we could over label or end up not labelling enough. That is not defined in the bill as presented by the member. This is a subject for debate and questions. What is it? Is it a product that is 100% GMO? Is it a product that is at a certain percentage? How do we define that? How do we do it? At the health committee we can hear from experts who perhaps can help us.

This is not the ideal. The ideal would be that we would do this through regulation rather than through a bill, that we would make a minor amendment to the act so that it compels the minister to create the regulations. The regulations can be modified as market conditions or scientific conditions change a lot faster than bringing it back to this House in a bill to modify it. That is a problem.

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I recognize the point of the member that if we do not do it through a private member's bill, we may not do it at all. That is an issue that will have to be debated at the committee to see if there is a way to do it under the current regulations that would meet the desired effects of this bill without creating stand-alone legislation, to do it through the regulatory process.

That would be the wise way for us to proceed. We have huge industrial and agricultural interests in this country and other areas that have an interest in this, that would want to make sure that we do not disadvantage ourselves when it comes to the products that we are competing against in our very own market and in other markets.

Other countries could say that when 50% of the product is manufactured from GMO it has to be labelled as GMO. However, in Canada a product that is 10% GMO would have to be labelled as such. Consumers would see on the same shelf a competing product from another country with 40% GMO not labelled as GMO. We would be producing a product that has less GMOs in it, but it would have a competitive disadvantage because the consumer would believe that it was all GMO and that the other product was not, whereas actually more GMO entrants were included within that competing product from another country. We have to consider the point the parliamentary secretary raised. It is a valid point. We have to consider our trade relationships and where we are in relation to other countries.

Our party has advanced a grown in Canada initiative with four major actions. This would play well within its intent.

We should design regulations under the current Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act to clarify the definitions of "made in Canada", "product of Canada" and create a separate "grown in Canada" label for 100% Canadian grown products.

We should work with farmers and agri-food value chain partners to create a non-profit governing body that would manage and implement a voluntary "grown in Canada" label that would identify 100% Canadian grown products and work with CFIA to establish an audit process to maintain label integrity.

We should establish a grown in Canada marketing fund with two major objectives.

We should provide marketing grants to local farmers' markets and other buy local initiatives in communities across Canada.

We should develop a marketing campaign informing Canadian consumers of Canada's strong record of farm initiatives for environmental sustainability, food safety and others.

We should develop a grown in Canada toolkit, a series of knowledge and development programs where farm and industry organizations work in partnership with the government to develop information and business extension tools.

• (1805)

[*Translation*]

I could go on about this, but we all understand the problems associated with buying products labelled as made in Canada. These products, food or otherwise, can be made entirely in other countries and just packaged in Canada.

Recently, there were problems with toothpaste and pet food. Labels indicated that the products came from Canada or the United States, markets that people are familiar with and that comply with food safety standards. However, the products inside the packages were from China and did not comply with safety standards. We saw what happened as a result.

It is important to answer all of these questions. My time is up, but there is still a lot to discuss. We will have to continue this discussion in the Standing Committee on Health.

Once again, I would like to congratulate the member on introducing this bill, as well as all of the members who took part in the debate.

[*English*]

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is with some pleasure that I enter this evening's debate. Obviously this is an issue that the New Democrats hold near and dear to our hearts as the history has been recounted in this place.

[*Translation*]

Bill C-517 is almost, word for word, the same bill as the one introduced by my colleague for Winnipeg North during the 37th Parliament and then introduced by my colleague for British Columbia Southern Interior in this Parliament. This is a necessary and long overdue bill and I am pleased to support it.

[*English*]

To recount the history of how this bill has been making its way through this place steadily parliament after parliament, it seems clear to me and to many others that it is a response by politicians representing different parties to a need expressed by Canadians.

• (1810)

This bill attempts to allow people a greater certainty to have as much information as possible on the products they are buying for their families, the food they are consuming. Many people have approached me and I am sure many of my colleagues in this House have been approached as well. People are confused and concerned about what it is they are buying in the stores. They want to know what the chemicals and other ingredients that are listed on the back of products actually are.

Most folks are not organic chemists. Most folks do not spend a great deal of time researching on the Internet each chemical additive to the products they are buying. Certainly there are very few, even those who specialize in organic chemistry, who understand the interaction that occurs when chemicals come together and what it means for the consumer, for the human form and for our environment in general.

When we step into the realm of genetically modified foods and products, we step into an entirely new conversation. This conversation about what the consequences are has not been properly had in this Parliament, in many of our legislatures and in the homes of Canadians. We need to understand the ethical, moral and environmental implications of the genetically modified foods that we consume, the foods that we put on the table for our friends and family, foods that have been modified at the genetic level.

Of course many on the big agriculture side, the Monsantos of the world, will say that foods have been modified for centuries. They will say that they have been trying to make crops grow better under certain conditions by only picking out the wheat that grows best or the cow that produces the most milk and that that is a genetic modification. It is patently false to try to compare those two systems and assume that they are one.

On the one hand we are choosing from the herd the cow that might produce more milk. In this case the genetic modification of food is when a scientist comes along and pulls genes from an organism at the molecular level and replaces them with genes from an entirely different organism. Genes from salmon are being put into genes that are meant to grow corn. Genes from a whole myriad of organisms are being placed into other organisms.

There is a fundamental principle that is absolutely missing from the legislation that governs this country. That is the precautionary principle.

We were very proud last year that a bill that New Democrats put forward to ban a series of dangerous chemicals from products in Canada was debated and modified at the environment committee and passed unanimously in this place and went to the other place. It applied the precautionary principle as its foundation. It said that in the absence of 100% evidence, which is sometimes the excuse I have heard from Health Canada and Environment Canada officials, that we do not have 100% conclusive evidence on a thing and in the overabundance of evidence pointing us in a certain direction there is something to be worried about with a new chemical or product, the precautionary principle says that we must act in a cautious way because otherwise the full testing of that product is taking place with the public in the marketplace. That is not responsible government.

We often have debates in this place about what the real role of government should be, what should government do and what should it not do. In this case, the setting out of the basic rules and principles as to what will be safe and what will be considered unsafe is clearly a role for government, because at the individual consumer level it is impossible.

It is an impossibility to say that rampant individualism will rule the day and people will simply know enough and will have done enough research themselves that they will conduct themselves in a safe manner and will ensure that nothing unsafe will end up on their kitchen tables. It is foolish. Every day in this place we pass security bills, crime bills and environmental legislation that we hope provides the rules and the framework in which industry and individual consumers can guide themselves, can participate in the rules. This place is a referee for what is fair and unfair, what is safe and unsafe.

There is another very important issue, and that is the reversal of the burden of proof. The industry, which profits from genetically modified foods, should be responsible for proving that its products are safe before putting them on the market, and not the government.

However, the onus of responsibility is somehow reliant upon government to prove a thing safe, to run the tests. We know scientists in Health Canada and Environment Canada, and it is not only this administration but with the previous administration as well, have brought forward concerns about genetically modified products. They

### *Private Members' Business*

have said that in certain circumstances they have had some scientific concerns. We know a number of things have happened to them, and promotion has not been one of them. They have been terminated. They have been threatened. They have been muzzled.

This goes beyond the ideology of one party or another. This goes to the safety of Canadians and the freedom of science to conduct itself in a rational way, to provide advice and guidance to the government of the day.

We know in recent magazines the government has been noted as a so-called enemy of science, fearful of the science. That was in relation to issues around climate change and the resistance to meet the preponderance of evidence saying the climate science was in and that we needed to conduct ourselves in a different way.

We have never seen this in the history of Parliament, in Westminster tradition, but the government is filibustering a private member's bill at committee, delaying, denying, stalling hour after hour, not letting the democratic will of this place and the country to be expressed.

Is there anything more fundamental than what we do here? It is to allow the free and fair exchange of ideas and debate, to allow the best ideas to come forward and to allow the will of Parliament to be expressed, the will of the voters who put us in this place and to whom we are responsible to conduct ourselves.

What do we see from the government? It simply does not like the bill put forward by the leader of the New Democrats, the member for Toronto—Danforth. Its response to disliking environmental legislation, environmental initiatives like this one, is to filibuster, delay, deny the existence of this and therefore abdicate its responsibility.

This is consistently why New Democrats have found a lack of confidence in the government, an inability to support it in its agenda. It conducts itself in a way that is unsupportable.

We feel that if genetically modified foods are a safe thing, if the government feels it has the science and the evidence on its side to say that this is safe, 100% guaranteed, then the labelling of such products, the identification of those products, should not be a problem. Consumers will then have a choice between a product that has been genetically modified or one that has not. Consumers will vote with their feet, will vote with their dollars and they will choose products that are safer for their families.

I urge all members from all parties to take this bill into consideration, to let their conscience guide them, to support it, allow it to see debate and eventual passage so we finally feel full confidence in the products that appear on our shelves and on our tables.

• (1815)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marcel Lussier (Brossard—La Prairie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am also very pleased to speak to this debate on Bill C-517, a private member's bill introduced by the member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, which would amend the Food and Drugs Act. The bill primarily deals with foods and food components for human consumption that are or that contain genetically modified elements.

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As the member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles said, this is not the first time that the Bloc Québécois has tabled a similar bill in the House of Commons. On November 4, 1999, Hélène Alarie's Bill C-309 was adopted at first reading. In reading this, I am very surprised to see that in nine years, Parliament has not been able to produce legislation on labelling for GMOs.

Bill C-517 would make the labelling of GMOs mandatory. The new clause 7.3 proposed in the bill provides for a list of genetically modified foods to be made available to the public. The bill also provides for prison sentences and fines for any violators.

In the absence of information about the medium- or long-term impact of GMOs, it is natural to have concerns.

Canada has no standards in place to force mandatory labelling of foods containing GMOs, despite the demands and concerns of many consumers and the recommendations of many studies and reports. The federal government's policy of voluntary labelling remains a fiasco.

In September 2003, after four years of consultations, the Canadian General Standards Board reached a decision regarding the rules for voluntary labelling of products containing GMOs. According to lobby groups following the issue, a final compromise was reached that involved complex, ambiguous labelling left to the discretion of the industries and manufacturers.

On April 15, 2005, on the first anniversary of the implementation of voluntary labelling policies, Greenpeace, the Union des consommateurs, Équiterre and other environmental groups denounced the laxity of the measure, demonstrating that it is still impossible to find foods labelled as containing GMOs. Those groups even based their information on a Health Canada assessment, estimating that nearly 70% of processed products found in grocery stores in Quebec and Canada would contain GMOs.

Once again today, Greenpeace, in partnership with the Bloc Québécois and the Union des consommateurs, came to Parliament Hill to say that the contamination of cultures by GMOs concerns all agricultural producers.

Voluntary labelling standards have failed completely, according to Greenpeace, which also reminded us that 86% of Quebecers are demanding or calling for mandatory labelling. Its consultations with agricultural producers in Quebec confirmed that over 80% of farmers also want mandatory labelling. We can therefore ask when the government will give consumers the right to know if their food products contain GMOs.

Greenpeace and the Union des consommateurs came here to ask the Canadian government to respect and ratify the Cartagena protocol on biosafety.

•(1820)

They are also calling on the government to respect consumers' fundamental rights to know what is in the foods they eat. Some 40 countries around the world have already brought in mandatory labelling. The Union des consommateurs is demanding that research into biotechnology be continued and improved.

Today, at this press conference on GMOs, Canada's dairy producers and Quebec's Union des producteurs agricoles also lent their support. The president, Réal Gauthier, also came to represent the Laurentian and Outaouais dairy producers.

In his speech, the member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles mentioned that he had two idols in his riding: Claire and Norbert. He happened to mention that he was talking about young people aged 11 or 12. Last year, I had the same experience in my own riding. Two young people, Thomas Drolet and James Cameron, also got involved at school and created an Internet site to inform the community and their classmates about the problem of GMOs. They also came here to the House of Commons to present a petition with over 2,000 names of people who support them and recognize the need for mandatory labelling of genetically modified foods.

These young people did their research. They learned about the issues, they did a lot of reading, and they consulted websites about GMO issues. They developed their knowledge of the subject and shared that knowledge through presentations in class. I am very surprised that these primary school children are so interested in health issues at such an important time in their lives, right before they go to secondary school. We should pay close attention to these young people and tell them that we will accede to their request concerning GMOs.

Bill C-517 is a bill that also focuses on future generations and seeks to ensure that they have the right to healthful food and can read the labels to find out exactly what they are about to eat. Twelve year olds can make choices too. The young people at Notre-Dame-de-Saint-Joseph school in La Prairie want to make informed choices. Some people might tell them to consult the government websites that list the 50 products. However, when people are buying products or eating chocolate bars, they need to know what they are eating. If the chocolate bar label says that the product contains modified organisms, young people will be able to freely choose what they want to eat.

Bill C-517 is about the future. It is for future generations, for the young people who are now asking us—urging us—to pass this new bill.

•(1825)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

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## ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

[English]

## NATIONAL DEFENCE

**Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in January I asked a question in this House concerning a statement made by our Prime Minister. The Prime Minister told this House that the medium lift helicopters and the unmanned aerial drones were already on order.

In fact, neither contract had been signed, contrary to what the Prime Minister stated, and at that time there was no agreement in place to obtain the helicopters' unmanned aerial drones for our soldiers fighting in Afghanistan. This week, we have learned that the Canadian government has partnered with the United States in obtaining the needed military equipment.

However, I should not have to stand in this House to remind the government that Canadians deserve the truth and they expect honest answers from those who are chosen to represent them in this place.

The amount of misinformation that has surrounded Canada's mission in Afghanistan is flabbergasting, to say the least. It begs the question as to whether the misinformation is an intended effort to mislead Canadians on this very important mission, or does the government simply not know what is going on in Afghanistan?

Last spring, we were told there was no evidence of torture with regard to Afghan detainees. Even while officials at the Department of Foreign Affairs, national and international media sources, and even the president of Afghanistan himself, all acknowledged the use of torture by Afghan security forces, the Conservative government simply dismissed these allegations as Taliban propaganda.

For more than a year, the Conservative government has insisted Afghan detainees were being treated fairly and in accordance with the Geneva convention. As we know now, this is simply not the case.

In another confusing incident last summer, the defence minister at the time said that NATO had been notified about the end of our mission. This was not the case at all. For several weeks, we heard contrary remarks from various representatives of the Conservative government as to the future direction of our mission in Afghanistan.

Those were confusing times for members of this House. Those were confusing times for Canadians. And certainly those were confusing times for members of the Canadian Forces.

This Parliament, through the efforts of the official opposition, has been successful in bringing clarity to Canada's future in Afghanistan. However, with its extensive history of mishandling and with the extensive misinformation in this House, can we really count on this government being able to honour its commitments?

Liberals believe that clarity, honesty and transparency are absolutely essential in our mission in Afghanistan. We must work hard to restore Canadians' faith in the Afghan mission, which has been dramatically undermined by the constant contradictions that have flowed from this government.

Today in the question of the week, the Thursday question that the opposition House leader asks the government, the government was asked when it is going to strike the committee that it undertook to report to Parliament to make sure that Canadians and Parliament

have transparent access to good information. What did we get? We got a non-answer and heckling by the chief government whip.

Canadians must have faith that core values, including respect for human rights and the belief in the dignity of all people, are at the heart of this mission and that Canadians have a transparent, clear view of what our role is as it evolves in Afghanistan.

• (1830)

**Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I always enjoy listening to the fantasies coming out of the mouth of the member for Kitchener Centre.

Allow me first, though, to say how pleased we are by the initial outcomes of the NATO summit in Bucharest. The commitments made by our allies are good news for Canada and good news for NATO.

More important, though, the additional troops are good news for the people of Afghanistan, who are working hard to rebuild their lives. We will certainly be discussing the specifics of the additional troop commitments with our allies in the coming months.

An enhanced NATO presence will allow the Canadian Forces to consolidate and expand stability and security operations in Kandahar, which will further allow our development and governance efforts to take root. The commitment of additional troops satisfies one of the important conditions set out in the motion adopted by the House to extend our contributions to the United Nations mandated NATO-led mission in Afghanistan.

Another important recommendation put forward by the independent panel on the future of Afghanistan was the requirement for high performance UAV and helicopter capabilities for our troops in Afghanistan. We are well on our way to achieving that goal. We certainly appreciate our allies' efforts to assist with our need for additional helicopters, including the recent announcement by Poland that it will deploy additional helicopters to Afghanistan.

The government continues to demonstrate its commitment to providing our troops with the equipment and protection they need to fulfill their tasks. To that end, we have significantly enhanced our capabilities in the field.

For example, our new route clearance vehicles are reducing the risk of convoy travel. We are also making arrangements to keep the Leopard 2 tanks in theatre until the end of the Canadian mission.

With respect to helicopters and UAVs, we have been working for some time now to procure capabilities for domestic and international operations, including Afghanistan. I can assure members of the House that the government is actively working on accelerating the acquisition process to provide our troops with the equipment they need.

For example, the Department of National Defence has already announced its intention to acquire Chinook helicopters for domestic and overseas operations. This project has been approved by cabinet and it is anticipated that a contract will be awarded this year.

To address our immediate needs, the government is currently exploring a number of options with our allies and industry.

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For example, we are looking at the possibility of acquiring Chinooks that are already configured for U.S. army operations in Afghanistan. We are also exploring leasing options with industry and are looking at our existing fleets to determine what might be possible.

Leasing civilian helicopters is also common practice in Afghanistan. Private companies are already providing this service to the UN, the Afghan government and some of our NATO allies for operations in lower risk areas.

With respect to UAVs, we are currently working with our colleagues at Public Works and Government Services Canada on a number of options to provide our troops with high performance UAVs as soon as possible.

In fact, we have a three year project called Noctua, aimed at leasing high performance, long endurance UAVs capable of intelligence gathering throughout the Canadian Forces' area of operations in Afghanistan. This project will be a substantial improvement over what we currently have in theatre and is expected to be operational in theatre by February 2009.

A letter of interest to industry has already been posted on the Internet and it is anticipated that a request for proposal will be released very soon.

Our government is also working on the purchase of long-range UAV systems for domestic and international operations, including maritime and Arctic surveillance. We are working to deliver these capabilities as quickly as possible in order to meet the safety and security requirements of our troops and are confident that we can deliver these capabilities by February 2009.

These initiatives highlight our commitment to rebuilding the Canadian Forces and ensuring the safety of our men and women in Afghanistan.

After decades of darkness, some of which I lived through, I can tell members that the men and women of the Canadian Forces are not confused at all about what we are doing in Afghanistan. They are not confused at all about what the government is doing for them. We are going to continue to get the job done, with or without the help of the opposition.

• (1835)

**Hon. Karen Redman:** Mr. Speaker, that is an interesting way for the parliamentary secretary to end his intervention, because if it were not for this opposition party coming together with what was a Canadian motion, with a Canadian stand in Afghanistan, I really do scratch my head at what this minority government thinks it would have done for our men and women in Afghanistan.

Clearly there is a line in the sand. The parliamentary secretary mentions that we are a member of NATO. It was a Liberal government, under the auspices of NATO and at the invitation of President Karzai, that went into Afghanistan in the first place.

I would like to know that Canadians have a transparent and clear view of what we are doing as we go forward. Quite clearly, I think there has been evidence that the government has used the motions in the House as political cover for this very important mission, so I would not want the House to be misled in any way. It would be very

refreshing to have Canadians and parliamentarians know what is going on in Afghanistan as we move from the current—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** It is with regret that I must interrupt again and give the floor to the hon. parliamentary secretary.

**Mr. Laurie Hawn:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is quite right when she says it was the Liberals who sent us there. It was the Liberals who prosecuted World War II and Korea. That is what we were trying to remind them of in spite of some of their opposition early on when we were trying to bring resolution 4 to the House.

We had to remind them of their own history so that they would in fact do the right thing, which ultimately they did. We applaud them for that, because Liberals and Conservatives together have always done the right thing in history when it comes to international obligations like this.

In terms of being open and transparent, when people do not pay attention, they do not hear what is being said. When we choose not to pay attention, we do not hear the facts. When we choose to ignore the facts that we hear, then we can stand up, say whatever we want and accuse a government or anybody else of not telling us the facts.

We have to listen to actually hear what is going on. Sometimes those members do and sometimes they do not.

ARCHER DANIELS MIDLAND

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary says that some people do not hear. It is absolutely true. He has not been listening for a long while on the Wheat Board, so I will try again tonight.

The question asked of the government on December 3 was whether former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney had lobbied the government, as a member of the board of directors of the transnational grain company Archer Daniels Midland, to undermine the Canadian Wheat Board.

The government, which includes the Prime Minister, has relied on Mr. Mulroney to provide advice and guidance. One thing the former prime minister has demonstrated is his expertise at making money for his clients. ADM is most certainly a client the former prime minister would want to see succeed, especially since he is on the board of directors.

In that light, the House should be made aware of the following with respect to who will benefit from the government's fevered ideological drive to destroy the Canadian Wheat Board. The problem is, where are most of the winners from the government's drive to undermine the board? They are south of the 49th parallel in the United States, especially among the multinational grain trade.

The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, in a November 2005 study, outlined the consequences of the loss of the Canadian Wheat Board and the Australian Wheat Board. It stated:

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The...proposal to eliminate monopoly export rights would effectively kill both the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) and...the Australian Wheat Board....The elimination of the CWB and AWB Ltd would do nothing to increase export competition for grains; the giants of the industry (Cargill, Archer Daniels Midland, Bunge and Dreyfus) will basically absorb the Canadian and Australian supply into their existing global grain processing and trading businesses....CWB and AWB Ltd. offer an effective second-best solution to the market failures and imperfections inherent in bulk commodity trading. Their private counterparts are much less constrained by public oversight and, at least for the producers they deal with, offer less benefit.

A report prepared by the Center for Agricultural Policy and Trade Studies at North Dakota State University found that if the Wheat Board were to be eliminated:

The U.S. and Canadian markets would become more integrated without the CWB, making it possible for multinational grain companies to buy wheat in Canada and export it from U.S. ports.

The beneficiaries of the loss of the Canadian Wheat Board have been enumerated in many United States studies. It is unbelievable that the Government of Canada, in putting forward this proposal, failed to do any studies or economic analysis. In fact, a study prepared for United States Senator Kent Conrad in November 2004 found that:

If the CWB's single-desk authority is eliminated, the advantages enjoyed by the CWB will disappear and the United States may become more competitive in offshore markets.

Again, the U.S. is gaining at the expense of Canadians.

The efforts of the Conservative government to undermine the Canadian Wheat Board have attracted the appreciative attention of the United States wheat industry. It is that time the Canadian government worked for Canadian farmers.

• (1840)

**Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is good that the member opposite has chosen to stay away from the topic of his question. It showed how out of touch he was in December, and it certainly shows how out of touch he is on this file today.

At the time he asked the question, he had the ridiculous notion that he was going to try to tie Brian Mulroney to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food. His notion flopped back in December. It seems like he did not learn his lesson then, so he is back again.

I am told the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food does not personally know, nor has he ever met, Mr. Mulroney. I am also told that Archer Daniels Midland has never met with the minister. Therefore, the member for Malpeque, as usual, is batting zero. This time he is zero for two, and I think he is probably zero for 1,000 on the Canadian Wheat Board file.

He also thinks that giving freedom to farmers is somehow going to benefit big companies. We heard a bit of a rant about that today. He does not realize that farmers in western Canada see the Wheat Board as one of the biggest companies of all. Most of them want some freedom from it. A majority of them are asking for freedom.

It was interesting. His words were that if farmers had freedom, they would be more integrated with the United States market. Does this mean that this year Canadian farmers would have then had access to the \$20 plus for durum to which the United States producers had access, while our producers were getting less than half of that?

We are used to hearing these illogical and extreme rants from the member opposite, but his question from December really shows that he has completely lost his grip on this file.

• (1845)

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** No grip lost here, Mr. Speaker, just the facts and that is what the parliamentary secretary tries to avoid.

Again, he fails to mention that the Canadian Wheat Board is made up of a board of directors of farm producers elected by their peers. There is another quote that I want to put on the record in terms of how bad the decision of the government really is in terms of U.S. influence. Agriculture Canada made this statement at a conference in North Dakota a few years ago:

—the Wheat Board should not be viewed as an independent entity but as an extension of producers themselves into grain marketing. Through collective action, producers are able to counteract the market power of domestic railways, handling companies and international grain marketing firms just the way a credit union helps ordinary people cope with concentrated market power in local financial markets.

That is what the Wheat Board does for producers in Canada.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Mr. Speaker, the issue has always been simple. Western Canadian farmers want a fair and open system to market their grains. They want the freedom to make business decisions that work best for them.

This government has listened to farmers and that is quite different from the decade of neglect that was shown by the previous Liberal government. We are actually taking action. We are working to provide what farmers are asking for.

The member just listens to a few people. He selectively picks the people he wants to hear and he tries to weave some great and vast conspiracy out of that.

This government was elected to provide freedom for western Canadian farmers. We were elected to update and improve the marketing and transportation of grain, and we look forward to doing that for western Canadian farmers.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted.

Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:47 p.m.)





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