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(HANSARD)

Monday, November 24, 2008

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, November 24, 2008

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

• (1100)

[*English*]

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed from November 21 consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session, of the amendment and of the amendment to the amendment.

The Speaker: When the matter was last before the House, the hon. member for Simcoe North had the floor for questions and comments consequent on his speech. I therefore call for questions and comments.

There being none, we will resume debate with the hon. member for Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleagues for their support and enthusiasm. Before I begin, I should mention that I will be splitting my time with the member for Berthier—Maskinongé, who is with us this morning.

I found the throne speech very surprising, but not in a good way. I expected something completely different, given that the government supposedly decided to convene the House because Canada is facing a serious crisis, particularly in the manufacturing sector. Since the House was convened so soon after the election, I was expecting to hear about some very concrete measures in a number of areas, but that is not at all what happened.

At a press conference just this weekend, the Prime Minister did not convey any sense of urgency with respect to addressing the terrible crisis that people are going through right now, especially in my region and throughout Quebec. For example, since the beginning of the crisis in the softwood lumber sector, over half of the 300 processing plants in Quebec have closed, some of them just recently. As a result, in Quebec alone, some 30,000 workers have been laid off over the last few months and years.

It seems to me that all across Canada, wherever lumber is a major industry, such as in British Columbia, this crisis is extremely far-reaching and very bad for all regions like mine. I expected the Prime Minister to come up with a plan to help businesses deal with this crisis, but that is not at all what we got. Instead, we got a throne speech that I found feeble and virtually content-free.

This past weekend, the Minister of Finance suggested that we might have to wait until the introduction of the budget for any measures to be announced. But the crisis is happening now, and it is serious. Unfortunately, the throne speech offered no hope at all to workers or to the people of my riding.

One more example is that as recently as November 21, one of the largest companies in the riding of Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, Uniboard—Panval, announced yet again that it was cutting back on some of its activities. Not only is the company scaling back but the company has also said that, given the crisis, it is extremely difficult to predict when it will be able to start production again, because it produces particleboard panels used to build furniture. When consumption decreases, companies have no choice but to scale back production.

This is a company with 350 employees, in an RCM with 14,000 to 15,000 people. So one can imagine the impact such a closure would have, even though it is true that these people will be eligible for employment insurance. But, once again, there was absolutely nothing in the throne speech about employment insurance. EI provides only 50% of an employee's regular salary, and just for a given period of time. Not to mention there is a two-week waiting period, which we would like to get rid of.

There was absolutely nothing in the throne speech with regard to ways we can weather the crisis we are experiencing. And, with one small exception, there was absolutely nothing for culture either. The government is upholding the cuts it has made to culture and to non-profit economic organizations. These organizations are extremely important to our region.

During the election campaign, I gave some examples for the Rimouski sector among others. I could give the example of SEREX, a research organization in the Matapédia valley sector.

The Address

•(1105)

Why is the Bloc Québécois calling for significant investment in research and development? Why is it calling on the two levels of government to increase their investment in research and development? The answer is simple: if we want to create new jobs and if we want our businesses to grow and be competitive abroad, there must be significant investment in research and development in order to come up with new products and new methods of doing things.

At present, businesses in Quebec and throughout Canada do not necessarily have the financial means to invest in research and development. Therefore, the two levels of government—both the federal government and the Quebec government—must do so immediately.

We know that the Quebec government has reduced its funding for research and development over the past years. I find that extremely unfortunate because it has meant a slowdown in the development of new products and new technologies that could increase our productivity. When there is a crisis, businesses obviously do not necessarily have the cash to significantly invest in research and development, even though it is important. If we are to weather this crisis, we must develop new methods to increase productivity and new products as well.

There is something else that was not mentioned in the Speech from the Throne. Rather, I should say that it was mentioned, but in a negative way: the consensus in Quebec on how to deal with young offenders was completely ignored, as were our views on the gun registry. The Quebec government's request was very simple: transfer the gun registry and let it run it. The government absolutely refuses to come to an agreement with the Government of Quebec.

It is the same story when it comes to the environment. The throne speech makes no mention of the Kyoto protocol. The government does talk about investing in new energy sources and clean energy, but it also mentions investing in nuclear power. Moreover, the government does not say it is going to stop investing in the oil sands, which cause a great deal of pollution and are currently the main source of greenhouse gas emissions in Canada.

The government needs to understand that if it wants to invest in so-called green resources and renewable energy, then perhaps it should cut back on the production of oil from the oil sands. Then the government could give us the money it is currently giving the major oil companies, so that we could make major investments in renewable energies.

I am talking about renewable energies such as wind energy, solar panels and biofuel. Not enough money is being invested to reduce our dependence on oil to any significant extent. Yet during the recent American election campaign, both the Republicans and the Democrats promised to invest heavily in renewable energies to minimize our dependence on oil.

Why should we reduce our dependence on oil? Probably for two reasons. First, oil produces a great deal of greenhouse gas. Second, by reducing our dependence on oil, we are less subject to market forces. We all know what has happened on the markets in recent months. Oil prices skyrocketed, and many of our companies have been affected. I am thinking in particular of Uniboard in Matane,

which is trying to find ways to lessen its dependence on oil. But that takes money, and the company, like companies throughout the manufacturing sector, is unfortunately short of capital.

I will conclude by saying that the throne speech is extremely disappointing. The government did not wait long after the election to convene the House, but it has come up with a lacklustre throne speech with little or nothing in the way of solutions to the crisis.

•(1110)

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's speech. He represents a region that made it very clear during the election that it wanted the Conservative government to take a different approach. The member himself referred to the cuts affecting regional development.

However, one thing is clear, and I find this remarkable: the current government ignored the results of the recent election. The Bloc Québécois' subamendment—which I will read quickly—states that we will be voting against the Speech from the Throne because “it does not respond to the consensus in Quebec respecting, for instance, the legislation on young offenders, the repatriation to Quebec of powers over culture and communications, the elimination of the federal spending power and the maintenance of the existing system of securities regulation”.

The Conservative machine continued to steamroll over all those issues, as though there had been no election in Quebec. Thus, this shows a degree of contempt for democracy in the throne speech and we hope the House will adopt our subamendment. It would serve to correct the Speech from the Throne.

The hon. member raised an important issue when he mentioned the cuts made to regional development. One good sign is the fact that the minister responsible before the election is no longer here and there is a new minister. We hope he will have a more open mind. Indeed, the cuts in this area definitely had a negative impact on Rimouski, as they did on the Lower St. Lawrence. We saw the same thing with PÔLE Québec Chaudière-Appalaches, in the Quebec City area.

We are heading into a recession. The Prime Minister said so yesterday. He added the word “technical” to try to play down the situation. Nevertheless, he acknowledged this reality, although, during the election campaign, he denied any possibility of a recession.

Now that the recession has been acknowledged and active measures are required, the first concrete action for regional development in the short term should be to ensure that these organizations are once again able to step in to support our regional economies, should it not?

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Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup for his question.

Yes, that should be done immediately. We are referring to non-profit economic organizations, as I just mentioned in my speech. He spoke of Chaudière-Appalaches and Rimouski; we could just as easily be talking about Gaspé, Trois-Rivières or Amqui. A group of organizations supported start-ups or businesses wanting to market new products or technologies. These organizations also helped companies with research. When you own a small or medium-sized enterprise you do not necessarily have the staff or the means to conduct research and development and for that you must rely on other organizations most of the time

I have a very concrete example in mind. In my riding, a clean firelog was developed, using a special process, that results in significantly lower greenhouse gas emissions and, at the same time, uses forestry waste. The company in question—not a very large firm—was unable to conduct the research in Canada and it had to be done in Finland. We have to realize that had we invested in research and development, the research could have been done here and probably much more quickly. That is a very concrete example.

For small or medium-sized companies, it is extremely important that non-profit economic organizations be subsidized and capable of continuing to work with them. That will be the key to success for our companies, especially in times of major economic crisis when competition is even fiercer.

• (1115)

The Deputy Speaker: There is just enough time for a quick question. The member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is the first time I have risen to speak in this Parliament. I would like to thank my voters for trusting me and for voting for me. I would also like to congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, on your election to the chair.

I have a quick question for my Bloc colleague. There is an election campaign going on in the province of Quebec, and we have just had a federal election. How can the member, in good conscience, not support the throne speech and, following that speech, decide not to work together with this government, even though it called an election and nothing changed? How, in good conscience, could we waste another \$300 million of taxpayers' money?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia has 30 seconds to respond.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: Mr. Speaker, that is not very generous. I have only 30 seconds to respond to such a broad question.

In my opinion, the federal election was useless, as is the one currently going on in Quebec. Let me be clear. An election was called when we were heading towards a major crisis. The House of Commons was called to meet as quickly as possible, but nothing has been proposed. I hope that is not what will happen in Quebec after the election. Since there is an election going on in Quebec, I hope that the government will react much more strongly and quickly.

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is the first opportunity I have had to speak since the beginning of this new Parliament.

I would like to thank the people of Berthier—Maskinongé for having placed their trust in me for a third consecutive mandate. I can assure them that I will continue to defend the interests of my constituents and the people of the Mauricie region, as well as the interests of all Quebecers, with strength, passion and determination.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak in the House, not because the Conservative government's throne speech has given us much to be happy about, but because I am speaking on behalf of the people of the region that I am honoured to represent.

Well before the throne speech was delivered, the Bloc Québécois made it clear to the Conservative government that it must abandon its laissez-faire ideology, which has been disastrous for Quebec's economy, and embrace the notion that the federal government has a key role to play in supporting the economy and helping people affected by the current crisis.

That is why the Bloc Québécois made a number of constructive proposals to help Parliament focus on what the people need as we enter an economic recession. Our proposals are based on a consensus reached through debate in Quebec during the recent election campaign. A majority of the people voted for the Bloc Québécois to defend their interests.

Over the past few months, the political parties in the National Assembly, business people and unions have all asked the federal government for strong measures to support our economy and in particular, of course, our manufacturing sector. Unfortunately, the throne speech was a great disappointment because none of the proposals put forward by the Bloc Québécois or the economic stakeholders in Quebec were included, even though our proposals were based on priorities that affect Quebecers and were drafted in response to their choices during the last federal election. That is shameful.

The throne speech confirms the Conservative government's complete disregard for the effects of the crisis on our economy and our people. The Conservative government is trapped in its outdated ideology.

This Speech from the Throne does not offer any revitalization measures to help the most vulnerable manufacturing industries that face international competition. For example, in my riding, the furniture industry still plays a significant role in job creation.

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Once again, the government has chosen to do nothing. True to its own ideology, this government still believes that the free-market economy, free enterprise without any state intervention, can fix everything and that any intervention by the government would only lead to negative effects for the industry. That is not true. The government has the responsibility to support our businesses and it must accept this responsibility. Essentially, we have a throne speech that is devoid of any measures, devoid of vision, and that once again ignores the economic base of Quebec, the manufacturing industry.

● (1120)

When will this government realize that it has a role to play in helping the economy, especially during a crisis? The Bloc Québécois is asking the government to stop ignoring this fact and, instead, assume its responsibilities and intervene to help our economy. We are still paying taxes to Ottawa. We are handing over huge sums of money to Ottawa, and we have the right to receive help for our industries.

Over and over, the Bloc Québécois has suggested funding and support options for the manufacturing and forestry industries. For example, we suggested loan guarantees to help companies modernize as well as making the research and development tax credit refundable so that companies can take advantage of it, even if they are at the development stage and not yet turning a profit. I am convinced that these measures would allow Quebec's industries, such as the furniture industry, to expand and rise to the challenge of international competition. We cannot abandon Quebec's entire manufacturing industry, as this government is doing. As I said earlier, the furniture industry plays an important role in the Berthier—Maskinongé region. We want to keep these jobs, everywhere in Quebec that these industries exist.

We have innovative businesses with a skilled workforce that have overcome the challenge posed by NAFTA. Now, faced with a difficult economic trade environment, many of them are in trouble. They need support from this federal government. Unfortunately, this government has ignored our proposals. Its only response consists of cutting taxes on profits, which, I would remind the House, is only beneficial to businesses that are making a profit. Most of our industries in Quebec are not generating any profits. Lowering taxes for companies that are not making any profit does absolutely nothing for our industries.

I encourage the members of this government to read a book called *La crise manufacturière au Québec: ça va mal à shop*, which translates roughly as, "The manufacturing crisis in Quebec: hard times in the factory". This just published book takes a look at all regions of Quebec affected by the manufacturing crisis. It talks about manufacturing jobs that have been lost in Beauce. That region has lost 3,000 jobs in five years. It talks about the 800 jobs lost at Goodyear in Valleyfield. And of course, it talks about the Mauricie region, and the jobs lost in the pulp and paper, textile and furniture sectors in the area I represent. It truly offers a good look at the big picture. I urge the members of the government and the opposition parties to learn more about this reality and the job losses in the regions of Quebec. The book also makes some proposals, for example, how this government should invest in and help our manufacturing industries. It is an excellent book.

No longer can it be said that Quebec's industries are prosperous. It is quite simply scandalous that this government is not taking urgent action. It is refusing to help communities in difficulty, yet it is continuing to help the oil companies in the west without hesitation. The government is saying it wants to support the nuclear energy sector, and it still intends to continue its unbridled military spending. With this throne speech, this government has shown us that it rejects many of the consensus reached by the National Assembly, the people, the unions and the various socio-economic players in Quebec society. We do not understand.

● (1125)

As a result, the Bloc Québécois will have no choice but to vote against this throne speech.

[English]

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the record and for the great Canadians from Quebec who are watching, on a per capita basis the people of Quebec receive more than any other Canadians in handouts and disbursements from the federal government.

Health care in Quebec has been quite innovative. Quebec has many things to teach the rest of Canada on the innovations it has with respect to mixing public-private partnerships, enabling individuals who get sick to access timely quality health care that every Canadian deserves to have in their time of need.

Does my friend not think there is an important role to be played by the minister of health for the province of Quebec to meet with counterparts from their department, the federal government and provincial ministries across the country in the area of health care to see how we can innovate to ensure Canadians from coast to coast receive timely access to quality health care when they need it?

I refer specifically to a couple of things. First, the importance of a national medical workforce strategy. Second, the importance of integrating public and private partnerships and public and private services like they do in Europe to support the public system. I would appreciate his input and comments on these important areas.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform my colleague that health comes under the jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces.

In Quebec, the health care system is well organized. We have a department of health and social services. In every region, we have regional agencies, CLSCs, health care centres and youth centres. Our system delivers services to all types of clients, from young people to seniors and people who are incapacitated and need hospital care. We have a very good health care system that is very well organized. We do not need a parallel health care system.

All we are asking is that the federal government transfer the money we send to Ottawa, in order to give more support to our health care sector, which is under enormous pressure because of our aging population.

Ottawa is investing money in a mental health commission. Quebec has a mental health policy. We have mental health practitioners in the CLSCs, we have mental health teams in the hospitals, we have psychiatrists, social workers, psychologists and nurses. We have a range of services. We do not need Ottawa—

• (1130)

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments. The hon. member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

[English]

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the hon. member from the Bloc heard the throne speech, was he as dismayed as I was? I waited to hear something around pensions, something for seniors, and it seemed to be lacking.

Is this not an opportune time for some kind of dynamic change to our employment insurance system? The reality is there is inequity about how many weeks people can be on EI, depending on what part of the country they are from. Quebec and Ontario workers seem to be penalized compared to other parts of the country.

I would put another point specifically for the member. Hearing the reports, it looks like the Prime Minister has now targeted the civil servants of our country and has made them scapegoats to divert attention from the real crisis we have at hand.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

Of course, the Bloc Québécois is in favour of economic development that supports social issues. Here, we have a government that does not think about the individuals who are losing their jobs. It refuses to improve the employment insurance system. This system was much more generous in the 1970s and 1980s, when claimants were eligible for about a year.

As for seniors, the guaranteed income supplement exists for seniors who are living at the poverty line with \$8,000 per year. We must support these people. This government does not think about individuals, does not offer social protection services and does not make investments to protect people experiencing economic problems. What the government needs to do is invest in our people, while, of course, continuing to invest in economic development—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Resuming debate. the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage has the floor.

[English]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to rise this morning to speak in support of the government's throne speech entitled, "Protecting Canada's Future".

I would like to give some of the context in which the Speech from the Throne was drafted. I note the debate this morning really has not given any context of Canada's current standing and what we were really getting at when drafting the Speech from the Throne. I note that a number of opposition members who spoke this morning talked about wishing to see knee-jerk responses and solutions. That is not what the Speech from the Throne is about. The throne speech is a

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road map. It is about guiding Canada in the proper direction to protect our future.

Before I get into my speech and to provide a backdrop, I want to highlight some news from this morning:

Given the slowdown in the United States, Canada's largest trading partner, Canada's recent economic performance seems to have defied the experts. For example, as car sales plummeted in the United States last month, car sales in Canada rose by 1%.

Actually, car sales rose by about 1.4%.

The U. S. economy has shed more than one million jobs in the past 12 months while Canada's economy, at the end of October, had created 223,000 new jobs in the same period.

The throne speech is about protecting Canada's future. When we talk about protecting Canada's future, we are talking about protecting the gains. Canada is not an island. Our largest trading partner, the nation with which we share the largest undefended border, is the epicentre of the global economic crisis. We are mindful of these things. What we are talking about is protecting the gains that we have made.

On October 14 the people of Canada entrusted this government with a renewed and expanded mandate, a stronger mandate to lead Canada through these difficult times. While embarking on this new mandate, our government is committed to providing the strong leadership that Canadians expect. We will protect Canadians in difficult times and work with them to secure our future prosperity. We will support Canadian workers and businesses in their pursuit of a better future.

Our government is committed to ensuring Canada's continued success in this time of global uncertainty. The Speech from the Throne lays out the government's plan to help protect Canada's economic security through five principles: by reforming global finance; by ensuring sound budgeting; by securing jobs for families and communities; by expanding investment in trade; and by making government more effective.

The Speech from the Throne also sets out our plan for governing that builds on the work of the previous mandate. We are focusing on priorities that make a difference for Canadians, the types of priorities that have delivered the types of results I outlined at the beginning of this speech, the types of priorities that have allowed us to outpace all nations in the G-8. As we enter this difficult time, Canada remains the only country in the G-8 that has an ongoing budget surplus, paying down debt while reducing taxes.

The Speech from the Throne sets out our plan for governing that builds on our mandate. We talk about: securing our energy future; tackling climate change and preserving Canada's environment; expanding opportunities for all Canadians; keeping Canadians safe; contributing to global security; and building stronger institutions.

I want to zero in on a number of priorities that are in the throne speech. Rather than talking about everything at a 35,000 foot level and glancing over things, I want to talk specifically about a number of issues that are concerning Canadians today.

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When we entered into the election, I heard about a lot of issues that I am not hearing about today. Only a couple of months ago the primary issue was the price of gas. I am sure a lot of members in the House will recall hearing about the same thing. That was the foremost issue on the minds of Canadians. Today is no longer the foremost issue on Canadians' minds. Their concerns have shifted to other things. What I am hearing a lot about in my riding of Peterborough is industry.

Peterborough is a manufacturing hub. That is our heritage and our history, ever since Thomas Edison located Edison Electric, which became Canadian General Electric. Members have often heard me refer to Peterborough as the electric city and my riding as the electric city region. Peterborough was the first city in North America to have electric street lights and that is because Thomas Edison located General Electric in Peterborough and the ability to generate hydroelectric power off the Otonabee River which flows directly through the region.

• (1135)

Industry has always been a major part of what we do in Peterborough and it is of major interest. The auto industry is very significant in my riding. General Motors is the largest private employer in Peterborough. A number of parts suppliers also operate in my riding and they employ people as well. Obviously industry is very important to the people of my riding and it is important to me as their representative.

There were specific commitments made by our government in the throne speech. I would like to highlight some of these and our commitment with respect to industry:

To further reduce the cost pressures on Canadian business, our Government will take measures to encourage companies to invest in new machinery and equipment.

The Canadian manufacturing sector, particularly the automotive and aerospace industries, has been under increasing strain. Our Government will provide further support for these industries.

I note that through Advantage Canada, our economic plan, and recent budgets we have made significant progress toward creating a business environment aimed at promoting long-term investment, innovation and job creation across all sectors of the economy. Again I go back to the comments that I made originally. While the U.S. has lost a million jobs, Canada has added 226,000 jobs over the exact same period. Indeed since our government has been in power, over the last not quite three years, we have added over 800,000 jobs to the Canadian economy. More than 17 million Canadians are working today full time. It is a record. We see unemployment at a near historic low at 6.1%. We see the effects of the measures that our government has taken.

While we recognize the strategic importance of the manufacturing sector and the challenging financial conditions and global competitiveness that our industry faces, our government has cut taxes to lower the cost for business. We have helped business compete and create jobs. By 2012-13 the Government of Canada will have provided more than \$9 billion in tax relief to the manufacturing sector. Our government is implementing scientific measures to strengthen the auto, aerospace and defence industries and improve access to capital for small and medium size enterprises in the Canadian manufacturing sector.

The finance minister has moved very swiftly over the last month to make sure there is liquidity in the market, to make sure the banks can continue to lend. That is supporting our manufacturing industries. It is supporting business. It is supporting small businesses in places like Peterborough and in all 308 ridings right across the country. That is why the actions being taken by this government and outlined in the throne speech are so critically important.

I note as a matter of background that in budget 2008, in support of Canadian industry and specifically the manufacturing sector, the Government of Canada implemented specific measures, such as the \$250 million automotive innovation fund. This fund supports strategic large-scale research and development projects in the auto sector. I note with some success that we have got commitments for operations such as the Essex engine plant near Windsor. This specific fund has been drawn upon to transition that plant, to make it more competitive and to ensure Canadian jobs in the future. It is a very important fund.

Again, the \$9 billion in tax relief over five years includes broad based tax reductions and a temporary accelerated writeoff for investments in machinery and equipment. This tax relief is supplemented by strengthening access to capital.

Canadian companies have been taking advantage of the accelerated capital cost allowance. They have been investing in new equipment. For example, Quaker Oats, Pepsi-QTG in Peterborough, has invested some \$26 million in its plant over the last couple of years. That is taking advantage of the accelerated capital cost allowance. That is allowing it to be more efficient, to compete, to be profitable. It is protecting 700 manufacturing jobs right in the heart of Peterborough. These measures are indeed having an effect.

What underpins industry in Canada? What allows industry in Canada to compete? When I have talked to industry leaders in Canada, they tell me that what they really need is infrastructure to support their core operations. They will make those investments if we provide them with the environment, with adequate and proper tax measures, competitive tax measures, and if we allow them access to capital. We have to make sure that our banks are in a position to support industry and finance those investments. What they really need is modern infrastructure that can support business.

• (1140)

That is why our government crafted building Canada, which is a \$33 billion fund. It is the largest federal government infrastructure investment since the second world war. What did the throne speech have to say about building Canada? What further commitments did we make to the infrastructure that supports Canadian business?

First we noted that the government has acted with leadership to implement an infrastructure plan that is helping provinces, territories and communities of all sizes modernize the infrastructure that contributes to a stronger economy, a cleaner environment and more prosperous communities.

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Through our government's unprecedented building Canada plan, we are providing long-term, stable and predictable funding to meet infrastructure needs across Canada. The government will continue to work constructively with our partners at the provincial and municipal levels to identify and approve infrastructure projects more quickly to get the money out the door. It is great that we have budgeted some \$33 billion for building Canada. My party has demonstrated outstanding leadership to budget money where it is going to make a difference. However, it is equally important that the money is not just budgeted but that it flows to our partners at the municipal and provincial levels.

While our government is making a historic \$33 billion investment over seven years through to 2014, the plan also provides provinces with predictable, flexible and long-term funding to restore infrastructure in Canada. The government has signed a framework with each and every province, which is critically important because the money has to have a way to flow.

I would also like to note that while we have provided predictability for the provinces, we have also provided long-term predictability for the municipalities, something they have asked for forever. When we made the GST rebate for the municipalities permanent, it allowed them to budget.

When I met with the municipalities in the winter of 2006, some 10 months after I had been elected, they indicated that in order to be able to plan from an infrastructure standpoint, what they really needed was at least a 10-year window so they would know what kind of money they could count on from the federal and provincial governments to ultimately plan their infrastructure priorities.

What have we done? We have told them how much money they will be getting over the next several periods and that they can count on the fact that the gas tax transfer will be permanent. We have also given them full refundability on the GST, a measure which saved the city of Peterborough about \$700,000 a year. It is a very substantial amount of money in a city with a budget of some \$80 million. Everyone can see it is a very significant amount of money.

What else do industries need? We are providing industries with the competitive environment they need. We are supporting their investments. We are making sure the banks are behind them. We are providing them with the world-class infrastructure they are going to need to get their goods to market. And then what do they need? They need markets.

Canada is a trading nation. As everyone in the House knows, Canada succeeds by virtue of the markets that it accesses. We know that Canada's predominant trading partner is the United States of America, but Canada's economy can become overly dependent when we have all our eggs in one basket. We do not want to have all our eggs in one basket, so we can look at some of the new agreements that our government has just signed. These are mentioned in the throne speech.

We are going to pursue new trade agreements in Asia and the Americas, as well as the European Union, to open markets for Canadian firms. Canada's global commerce strategy includes an aggressive trade negotiation agenda aimed at securing competitive

terms of access in markets that offer significant potential for our products and expertise.

The government will work toward finalizing bilateral trade agreements that bring greater prosperity to Canadians. Canada and the European Union are taking steps to prepare formal mandates with a view toward launching negotiations on an economic partnership as soon as possible. This has been a priority issue for Quebec Premier Jean Charest in particular, who has talked often about the need for an economic partnership, a trade deal, with the European Union. Our government is acting on that and we will get results.

● (1145)

I note that just this weekend we signed another bilateral trade agreement. The government will proceed to ratify the results of these trade negotiations that have been concluded with the EFTA nations, Peru, Colombia and Jordan. Canada's global commerce strategy again talks about this aggressive trade negotiation which is going to open up opportunities for Canadian business.

I talked about Peterborough a little bit and I talked about our industry. I talked about how Peterborough is a manufacturing hub. Indeed, if we look at the province of Ontario, we will find that Ontario is a world leader when it comes to nuclear energy. Some 40,000 skilled workers in the nuclear energy field live and work right here in the province of Ontario.

Peterborough, as the home of General Electric Canada, has always been a leader in nuclear energy. We have industries around us like Numet, General Electric, and Camco, that employ people from my riding.

The government made a specific commitment to nuclear energy in the throne speech. Canada is a world leader when it comes to nuclear energy. Parts of many of the generators around the world have been built in Peterborough at General Electric. Most of the very significant hydroelectric generators all around the world have been built in Peterborough, generators for the Hoover Dam, for example, the Churchill generators, generators all throughout Asia and South America. They were all built in Peterborough.

We have the know-how of how to build these things and how to generate green electricity. It is in Ontario and some of it is in my riding. When the government makes a commitment to ensure that the regulatory framework is ready to respond to the provinces that choose to advance nuclear projects, that is supporting industry in Ontario.

What we know is that nuclear energy is a proven technology and it is capable of providing large scale output. It is safe, it is clean, and it is emission free. In Canada and around the world investments are being made in nuclear power to meet energy, security and climate change goals.

The Address

It is clear that nuclear power generation will continue to play a role in Canada's energy mix since it contributes 15% of Canada's electricity generation and 50% of the electricity supply in Ontario alone. I note that in looking at other competing nations, in looking at France for example, another G-8 nation, France generates some 90% of its baseload capacity from nuclear energy. That has allowed France to outperform other nations when it comes to things to climate change. It is a realistic solution for Ontario's energy needs moving forward, for Canada's energy needs moving forward. It has been talked about as a potential solution for the Alberta oil sands in working toward bringing its greenhouse gas emissions down as well.

The government continues to support the work of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, a strong independent regulator that will oversee applications for all new nuclear projects. As noted in budget 2008, we also support Atomic Energy of Canada Limited with new funding and new leadership that we believe will see AECL through to the future.

Another industry that is critically important in Ontario and indeed in your home province, Mr. Speaker, is agriculture. What has our party done for agriculture? What did the throne speech have to say about agriculture?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Nothing, nothing.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: I hear the hon. member for Malpeque. He is jumping up and down. He is so excited about the commitments that we made in agriculture and how the party is moving forward in agriculture and really supporting our farmers.

The throne speech specifically talked about how the government is going to work to protect the supply management system in Canada. It also talked about support for marketing choice for western grain farmers, something that I know the hon. member for Malpeque is very excited about. It is something he wants to talk about. It is something that the government is going to work toward.

We believe in a strong agricultural industry in Canada and we are working toward that end. That is why rural Canadians and rural Ontarians, in particular, voted en masse for our party, for the government, for the Prime Minister, for the finance minister, and the agriculture minister.

In conclusion, Canadians have renewed their confidence in the government. The government is committed to Canada's continued success in a time of global economic instability.

• (1150)

All our energy will be directed to addressing the challenges Canadian families, businesses and workers face both today and in the future.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Peterborough is pretty good at trying to reinvent history but pretty poor in terms of actual facts. In his speech, he talked about the gas tax rebate and the refundable GST to communities. The fact of the matter is that was started by the previous government.

This is what the government that the member is a member of has actually done. It is strange that the throne speech is entitled "Protecting Canada's Future", when no prime minister and no government in Canadian history has jeopardized Canada's fiscal

future as much as that party and the Prime Minister over there have. The Conservatives have taken the fiscal capacity of the country and undermined it. They have taken surpluses and undermined them. They talked during the election campaign about not going into deficit, yet look at the Prime Minister's remarks today; they are now going into a deficit and blaming it on the global economy when it is really their party and the Prime Minister, and their actions that undermined Canada's fiscal security in terms of the country.

However, my question really relates to what the member talked about with regard to agriculture.

The hon. member said at the end of his remarks that Canadians, by voting the way they did in rural Canada, showed confidence in what that government was doing. No, they did not. The Conservatives got more seats. But we know that party got less votes than it did in the last election. Let us talk about that. That is not more confidence; that is less. The parliamentary system gives them more seats, yes, but the question is, what are they going to do for primary producers in this country?

We know in the last term you used every undemocratic action going to undermine the Canadian Wheat Board. You paid out \$1.1 billion less—

• (1155)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I know the hon. member for Malpeque knows to address comments through the Chair and not directly to other members.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Mr. Speaker, it is kind of a conundrum, I guess, that the hon. member for Malpeque finds himself in. More farmers elected more Conservatives right across this country, but somehow, in his own mind, that has not indicated a stronger level of support from agricultural producers for Conservative members. I am sure sometime between now and perhaps the end of the day he can come up with a means of justifying what he has just indicated, but certainly I do not think it will be rational.

He started off by mentioning a number of things that I would like to address. The Liberal Party often talks about massive surpluses that it used to have. The Liberals used to run these massive surpluses, everybody knows. Well, they could not project them, frankly. They would come out and say they figured that the surplus would be somewhere around \$3 billion. Then they would excessively overtax Canadians and then come out with, "Surprise. It's a double-digit, multi-billion-dollar surplus", and that of course led them to spending money in ways that did not benefit Canadians.

The Address

Indeed, the last Liberal budget had a 14% spending increase, but without the kind of principled focus that budgets should have, the types of things that really drive results here in Canada. I mentioned that in the last 12 months 226,000 new jobs were created in Canada and auto sales in Canada were up. In the United States, a million jobs were lost and auto sales were about half of what they were. That is the difference. That is the leadership of our Prime Minister.

Then again, on the agricultural file, our producers know that they can count on our government when it comes to things like the WTO. They know that we will stand up for supply management. We demonstrated it. The Liberals, in 13 years, never demonstrated any support at the WTO for supply management whatsoever. They were missing in action.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, everyone knows that what is preventing the government from eliminating the supply management system is the motion adopted in this House under a minority government, which the current government is forced to respect. As soon as we have a majority government in Canada, particularly a Conservative one, supply management will be swallowed up by the huge global market, by the open market that the Conservatives wish for. That is obvious and, in that regard, Quebeckers have proven to be very wise indeed—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Paul Crête: I see that the Conservative members are defensive because they know that it is actually true.

Something else is rather paradoxical. Today we are discussing a throne speech in this chamber; however, the real throne speech was delivered by the Prime Minister in Peru on the weekend. He said that there will be a deficit and there will be a recession, even though he qualified it as a technical recession to soften the blow. That is quite the opposite of what the Prime Minister said during the election campaign.

The banks have been helped; industries are going to get help, and that is fine. Will the government use common sense and, in keeping with the Prime Minister's statements on the weekend, will he also ensure that the most disadvantaged in our society, those who will lose their jobs in this recession, can count on an adequate employment insurance system? For example, we could eliminate the two-week waiting period that currently penalizes people who lose their jobs and need this money to make ends meet at the end of the month.

[English]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Mr. Speaker, once again, and since the member began his comments with supply management, I would just like to outline a couple of the things that our government did with respect to supply management.

First of all, at the WTO, we made sure that all of our partners had the unqualified knowledge that Canada would stand up for supply management no matter what. That is the position that our government took.

Additionally, if we go back to the actions that we have taken since the beginning of the last Parliament, we were the first party to move on things such as the importation of butter oils and milk protein concentrates. These were flooding in and circumventing our tariffs on dairy products coming in. We filed an article XXVIII on that.

We know that the Liberal Party did nothing on the issue of butter oils, which replaced a large portion of Canadian dairy production. Milk protein concentrates were new ingredients that were coming in to cheeses, replacing Canadian dairy farmers' products. We filed an article XXVIII to cap that and brought in compositional standards on cheese. If those are not things that are done by a government that supports supply management, I would like to know what the opposition parties would define them as. We are supporting supply management. They have been missing in action.

• (1200)

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to object to the hon. member for Peterborough speaking for Canadians in terms of wanting nuclear power and planning for nuclear power.

In Thunder Bay—Superior North and across northern Ontario, most of my constituents feel that nuclear power is expensive, dangerous and risky, and they do not want the burial of wastes in northern Ontario. What my constituents want in Thunder Bay—Superior North and what Canadians want across northern Ontario is sustainable energy. We want investments in solar, wind, hydro-electric and geothermal energies. We especially want to see serious programs by the government in terms of investing in conservation.

My question for the hon. member is this. When and how will the hon. member's party be interested in, invest in, and plan for truly sustainable energy sources?

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Mr. Speaker, the member is new in this House, so we will forgive him for not knowing about the many investments that our government has made into new and sustainable energy sources, things like wind and solar, indeed carbon capture and storage in Weyburn, Saskatchewan. He is not aware of these. Indeed, the previous member for Thunder Bay—Superior North, the hon. Joe Comuzzi, was up on these things and understood a lot of the broader Canadian economy.

As I noted in my speech, 40,000 Ontarians work in the nuclear industry. We are a world leader when it comes to nuclear, and I strongly suggest that the member does his research and learns a little bit about Canada's history and our record with respect to nuclear power. We are a world leader. The world is going to need energy. It is going to need clean energy and that is why it is so important to move forward on Canadian nuclear technology and Canadian nuclear know-how. The 40,000 skilled Ontarians who work in this industry are world leaders and our government supports it.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time today with the member for Charlottetown.

It is with great pleasure that I rise today to speak in response to the throne speech. Before I begin my remarks, I would like to thank the people of Kings—Hants for electing me as their member of Parliament for the fifth time. The people of Kings—Hants have given me the honour and privilege of representing them as their voice here in the House of Commons.

The Address

In the recent election, Canadians chose a minority Parliament. As parliamentarians, we have the responsibility to work together to respect that choice and to try to make this Parliament work. It is incumbent on all of us, all parties and all leaders, to try to put partisanship aside and to try to make this Parliament work in the best interests of Canadians, particularly during difficult economic times.

It is also important that all of us be completely direct with Canadians about the challenges we face and the root causes of some of these challenges. Financial clarity is particularly important now. After 11 years of surpluses, for many Canadians it was a sad day to see the word “deficit” in the throne speech as the government prepares them for what appears increasingly to be an inevitable deficit. After years of careful planning under the previous Liberal government, in just three short years the Conservatives are poised to return Canadians and the Government of Canada to deficit financing.

Fifteen years ago, a Liberal government inherited a \$42 billion deficit from the previous Conservative government. Under strong fiscal management by the Liberal governments of Mr. Chrétien and Mr. Martin, Canada turned the corner, eliminated those deficits and paid down debt.

Canadians will remember that balancing the books was not easy. It required tough decisions and many shared sacrifices. In order to maintain those hard-fought gains, a Canadian consensus emerged, a consensus that governments must take every precaution to avoid deficit financing. That is why Liberal finance minister Paul Martin implemented a contingency reserve, or a rainy day fund, permanently in Canada’s fiscal framework during those years.

As Liberals, we recognize that a government cannot always predict external economic shocks. However, a government can, and ought to, prepare for them.

Economic uncertainty was caused by 9/11, SARS, BSE and international currency crises, but Canada was able to withstand those external shocks and simultaneously avoid going into deficit. Under the Liberals, Canada not only paid down debt and cut income taxes and taxes on business and investment, but as a country we also built a fiscal and economic record that became the envy of the G8.

Just three short years ago, the Conservatives inherited the strongest economy and the strongest fiscal position that any incoming government has enjoyed in the history of Canada. We had the strongest economy in the G8. We had a \$13 billion surplus, a \$3 billion contingency reserve, the best job creation in 30 years and no deficit.

Since that time, the Conservatives have not only squandered the \$13 billion surplus but have also eliminated the \$3 billion contingency reserve, the rainy day fund. They have gutted Canada’s capacity to respond today to an economic downturn.

During the good times, the Conservatives spent the cupboard bare and put Canada in such a position that today we lack the financial and fiscal capacity to invest in vulnerable Canadians during the tough times.

It is not just dollars and cents. Canadians feel vulnerable as a result of the looming recession and the global economic situation. Canadians want governments to plan ahead, to prepare for inevitable

external shocks, and to ensure that during those times their government is not only prepared to invest in Canadians and to help them through those tough times, but is also capable of doing so.

During the election, the Prime Minister misled Canadians about the existence of a potential deficit.

• (1205)

Today, the Conservatives are trying to mislead Canadians about the cause of the deficit.

This is important in a minority parliament, because if we are going to deal with solutions honestly, we need to deal with problems honestly. We cannot, as a parliament, come up with solutions for the future of the Canadian economy unless we are prepared to admit the truth, perhaps the inconvenient truth, about the cause of some of the problems we face right now.

The deficit was not caused by the global economic situation, but by the Conservative government. Last week Kevin Page, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, said very specifically in his report that the deficit was caused by previous policy decisions of the Conservative government. He referred to policy decisions quite specifically, including cutting the GST as opposed to making other types of tax cuts that could have created more growth and opportunity, such as cuts to income taxes. He also referred to the fact that the Conservatives have increased spending by 25% during their short time in office.

Many people saw this coming and questioned Conservative fiscal responsibility long before Mr. Page wrote his report. Last February a *Globe and Mail* editorial compared Liberal and Conservative records on the economy. The following is what the editorial said:

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.

I continue with the *Globe and Mail* editorial:

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 lean budget on Feb. 26 that could, if the Conservatives don't watch their step, tip Canada back into deficit spending? That would be the Conservatives.

That was a *Globe and Mail* editorial on February 21, 2008.

Economists agree on what to do if we genuinely want to stimulate the economy. The Conservatives have said they cut the GST preemptively because they wanted to create stimulus, but in any of the budgets in which they cut the GST, the word “stimulus” was not used to describe why they were cutting the GST. In fact the Conservatives, and I think a lot of Canadians, know that they cut the GST more out of an interest in buying votes than in building prosperity.

The Address

If we really want to create economic stimulus, growth and prosperity, economists agree that we are better off to cut taxes on income, on investment, and on profit, not consumption taxes. In its recent report, “Tax Reform for Efficiency and Fairness in Canada”, the OECD argued that it is misguided to shift the tax base toward consumption. It said that in general, business and income tax cuts are better for economic efficiency, since “such taxes are thought to carry a high excess burden, while GST cuts not so much”.

However, Conservatives did not listen to the economists. Instead they went ahead with their wrong-headed tax measures, and now we as a country are moving ahead into deficit.

In terms of economic performance, there were trouble signs on the horizon long before the current global financial crisis. Canada's economy actually shrank during the first half of this year. We had the worst productivity numbers in 18 years. If anyone is wondering whether the Conservatives understand the economy, they have only to question the wisdom of what the Prime Minister said during the election.

On September 15 he said, “If we were going to have some kind of big crash or recession, we probably would have had it by now”.

That was on September 15. Canadians who took the Prime Minister seriously at that time, Canadians who took his investment advice and invested in the TSX, saw the TSX actually fall 33% since the Prime Minister gave that investment advice to Canadians.

On October 7, the Prime Minister said, “I suspect some good buying opportunities are opening up”. Since then the TSX has fallen 16%. We are finding out that the Prime Minister is not much better as an investment adviser than he has proven to be as an economist.

• (1210)

Canadians are justifiably worried. It will be critically important in the days and weeks ahead as we parliamentarians review the fiscal update on Thursday and as we debate the kinds of ideas that can move Canada forward during these difficult times.

It will be absolutely essential for the government to come clean as to the root causes of the fiscal situation we are in right now as a country. It will become absolutely essential that the government tell the truth to Canadians: that it was the government's misguided tax policies and big spending policies that put Canada into deficit. Before we as a Parliament are able to deal with solutions for the future, the Conservatives have to be honest about the causes of the problems we face today.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I welcome my colleague back to the House.

I have a point of confusion with the Liberals' perspective on these policies that the hon. member has just spent his time deriding. If he had an overspend and undertax concern with the way the government in the previous Parliament conducted things, why did the Liberal Party spend so much time supporting it?

If the current fiscal mess we are in, according to the budgetary officer, was caused by decisions made by the previous government that have contributed to the downfall of not only Canadians' savings but also of their security toward retirement, why did he and his party fundamentally support them?

It was not simply a matter of worries about an oncoming election. There were also concerns that the Liberal Party fundamentally believed and agreed with the Conservative Party. Again we see the Liberals forming a united coalition front on a neo-liberal agenda.

I wonder if he could answer that most simple of questions.

• (1215)

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, first, the Liberal Party does believe that cutting income taxes and taxes on investment is actually good for the economy. In fact, the hon. member could learn from looking at what more highly evolved social democrat parties in other parts of the world have done. The Scandinavian countries, for instance, have reformed their corporate tax system to attract capital and to develop growth, prosperity and opportunity so that they are able to invest in progressive social policy.

The challenge here is that the Conservatives do not care about social investment and the New Democrats do not understand the economy. The Conservatives do not really care about the environment and the New Democrats do not understand the economy. The only party that has a good understanding of the importance of a strong market-based economy and the priorities of the environment and social investment is actually the Liberal Party.

The hon. member's party actually defeated a previous Liberal government and a budget that included a national early learning and child care plan, the Kelowna accord to invest in Canada's aboriginal first nations communities, and unprecedented post-secondary investment.

My point is that his party sometimes makes decisions for which it has not been held accountable. As the Liberal Party in the House of Commons, we have the potential of forming a government when we earn the trust of Canadians to do that, and we must have a little more responsibility toward our decisions than is the case with his party.

Last, Mr. Speaker—

An hon. member: His party—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. Questions and comments. The hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, along the lines of the previous question, I say to my colleague, our finance critic, that I and many of us here were dismayed by the absence of any comment from the Prime Minister on the change that is required to the international financial architecture in order to address the Ponzi scheme that has just taken place and wreaked such havoc in the international markets. From his perspective, what ought the government to be doing to take a leadership role to address this issue?

My second question is on the issue of one of the pillars of our economy, the ability of individuals to have access to post-secondary education. We know that many people in all our ridings are now prevented from having access to post-secondary education by virtue of the amount of money they have in their pockets. That is completely un-Canadian.

The Address

We had some good suggestions. I would like my hon. colleague to present in the House the concrete solutions we had that would enable all Canadians to access the post-secondary skills training they require based on merit, not on the amount of money they have in their pockets.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, first, in terms of international financial architecture as we face this crisis, it is important to realize that the recent meeting of the G-20 in Washington is instructive for a couple of reasons.

First, the G-20 was a Canadian invention by the former minister of finance, Paul Martin. To see the G-20 go from being a meeting of finance ministers to now a full-fledged meeting of heads of countries is important. As we see the credibility that the G-20 has earned, and is earning, it will be critically important. That is something of which we should be proud.

It is also instructive that at that meeting the only disciple left, in terms of George Bush's economy approaches, is the Prime Minister.

I have one final point. There is a lot of pressure being put on global leaders now to come up with solutions. They are talking about Bretton Woods too. Bretton Woods took three years of preparation and three weeks of meetings to develop solutions at that time. We cannot expect overnight solutions.

However, I hope, as we are dealing with the current market failure of—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Continuing debate, the hon. member for Charlottetown.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to make a few comments in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

As everyone in this assembly is aware, the Speech from the Throne is what I would call a broad-based agenda of the government. It is not meant to be about specific legislation or specific programs. It is the government's agenda, or vision, for the next short period of time.

I want to very clearly put on the record my vision of our country.

There is a role for a strong central government that acts on behalf of all regions and all peoples in our country. We all have a shared destiny. There is a strong role for the federal government to play in the day-to-day lives of each Canadian, no matter what they do or where they work.

When I read the Speech from the Throne, I found it contradictory. I see some items in it that I certainly support. I believe they will foster that vision if they are implemented. On the other hand, certain statements perhaps will bring the country back, and I will speak to that.

Let me first indicate that there are a couple of items in the Speech from the Throne that I see as very much a step in the right direction.

The first one that has been talked about is the requirement for a single securities regulator. To quote from the Speech from the Throne, it states:

To further strengthen financial oversight in Canada, our Government will work with the provinces to put in place a common securities regulator.

Compared to other OECD countries, Canada, although it has an immense geography, is very small, with 34 million people. There are 13 jurisdictions. I do not believe we can continue with 13 separate securities regulators. That will not work going forward from a financial administration point of view. We will be better off as soon as we get one single securities administrator acting on behalf of all Canadians.

The Speech from the Throne talks about the need to work toward eliminating various interprovincial trade, investment and labour mobility. In actual fact, it puts a date of 2010 on this specific provision, and I support this initiative.

I urge the Minister of Finance to proceed on both initiatives. There will be objections from certain provinces with their vested interests, especially with the single securities regulator. I urge the Minister of Finance to be courageous and not back down but to move forward.

Another point in the Speech from the Throne is the whole notion of introducing legislation in the House to restrict federal spending power and I object to that.

As a member of Parliament, I do not agree with this concept. It lacks vision. The country is not about that. It is a policy statement that found its origins in the Reform Party, was copied by the Alliance Party and is here with the Conservative Party. It certainly would not be supported by the Progressive Conservative Party.

Federal spending power has been constitutionally recognized by the Supreme Court of Canada. It has been used by successive governments of different political stripes. I submit it has been used to build a better Canada. It has been used to develop and to enhance pan-Canadian values and visions. I will cite some programs as examples.

First, I will talk about the old age pension, which was a very limited amount. I believe it was enacted by former Prime Minister Diefenbaker. It was a small amount of money, but it had a tremendous influence on all Canadians.

That was followed up with the baby bonus. Again, this was a small amount of money that was universally paid to every family that had a baby under the age of 18.

• (1220)

This was followed up in the 1960s by the Canada Health Act. That was an immense change in the legislative framework of our country. It was not unanimous. In fact, doctors and the provinces were against it, but the government of the day was bold, courageous and had vision.

That was followed up with the Canada pension so that every Canadian, regardless of where he or she lived, would have the certain foundations of a pension plan.

The employment insurance program came next, followed by the guaranteed income supplement, so every Canadian over the age of 65 would be guaranteed a certain level of income.

The child tax credit came about in the 1990s and was especially important for low-income families that had children. Then we had the research programs that provided research, especially for post-secondary education. The list goes on and on.

The Address

These were programs and initiatives that perhaps would not have been successful or been adopted if we had this so-called restriction on the federal spending power.

This concept creates a firewall or a moat around each of our 13 jurisdictions. It causes nothing but difficulty. It certainly is not my vision of Canada and in the long run Canada will not work if it follows that concept.

It appears to me that this concept grows in what I would call good times. The economy over the last 12 years has been relatively good and the feeling has been allowed to grow that perhaps the 13 jurisdictions that comprise Canada really do not need each other. Perhaps all this talk about a shared destiny is just sentimental gibberish. It really does not affect Canadian values and vision.

Perhaps Canada can be better defined with a strict literal interpretation of the jurisdictional aspects of each provincial jurisdiction to be led by the ideology then in force by the government in power at that time. Perhaps we do not need each other, but I do not think that concept will work in bad times.

Right now our country is facing immense challenges. I would submit to the House and fellow Canadians that it is unprecedented, certainly since the depression of the 1930s. It is now a very serious issue and involves every industry, probably the automobile manufacturing industry more seriously than any other industry, but also the aeronautics industry, the forestry industry, the manufacturing industry, et cetera. From what we hear, read and see what is going on in our country now, there is a role, a very important role, for a strong central government.

Last week we had representatives from the automobile industry in Canada here. Last Thursday the association representing the automobile dealers was here. This morning's *Globe and Mail* talked about the forestry in B.C. Representatives are here asking for help from the federal government, and I believe the federal government has to respond. However, how will this so-called federal spending power fit in with that concept? It does not fit.

This has been allowed to grow in a restricted ideology that calls for less and less government, deregulation of every industry, whether it is the banking and mortgage industry, lower and lower taxes and blind adherence to capitalism. It allows for greed to set in and once greed sets in and is allowed to grow, we have very unpleasant repercussions. This situation should not be proceeded with and I do not think it will be proceeded with given our current economic climate.

•(1225)

The Speech from the Throne has some good elements that I applaud and will support, but there are some bad elements. However, in the long run, the government and this Parliament should move toward a strong central government that stands up for fairness, opportunity and respect for balance.

•(1230)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to the hon. member's speech, especially his conclusion, when he said that we need a strong central government. This helps me understand why the

Liberals decided to support this throne speech, which has been widely rejected by Quebecers.

In the recent election, the Conservatives received fewer votes and had fewer members elected in Quebec. One of the reasons was that Quebecers found that the Conservative approach did not correspond at all to what Quebec wanted. That is why we proposed an amendment to the amendment to the Speech from the Throne, which called on the House to “denounce the fact that it does not respond to the consensus in Quebec respecting, for instance, the legislation on young offenders, the repatriation to Quebec of powers over culture and communications, the elimination of the federal spending power and the maintenance of the existing system of securities regulation.”

This is what I understand from the hon. member's speech: the Liberals voted in favour of this throne speech because a centralized approach corresponds to their vision of Canada, as it does for the Conservatives.

Can the hon. member not understand why Quebec's solution is to leave Canada and become a country as quickly as possible? Then, Quebecers would have autonomy and their own decision-making powers. Canadians could have the kind of government they want, like the one the Conservatives and Liberals are currently working together on, in their search for a centralized government.

[*English*]

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, I make no apologies whatsoever for my comments about a strong central government. I believe that vision is accepted in most parts of Quebec.

The member asked about voting for it or against it. The Canadian people do not want an election over a Speech from the Throne.

We are dealing with a situation now where people are worried about their families, their jobs, their savings and their pensions. They want us to look at what is going on in this country with the economy and in the manufacturing industry so that this whole thing does not collapse. As a result, we do need, now more than ever, a strong central government that is able to respond to every Canadian, including all Canadians who live in the province of Quebec. We need a strong central government for all provinces, including Quebec.

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the House agrees with the points the member made with respect to the strength of the central government and the historic role. Primarily, from our experience in Ontario, that role has been one of contributing through equalization to the strength of the federation.

I wonder if the member could simply expand a little. Two of the programs that he talked about were the Canada Health Act and the employment insurance. Ontario does have an inequitable position as a result of changes in the equalization formula. I wonder if the member can see any hope for Ontario through the throne speech that the government is prepared to deal with that serious issue, the lack of equity in the present equalization formula.

The Address

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, I first want to welcome back my colleague from York South—Weston to the House.

He talks about equalization, the Canada Health Act and the employment insurance program. Those are all federal programs that were enacted by the Government of Canada under the federal spending power. If that particular provision that is being mentioned in the Speech from the Throne were back there in the 1960s when Tommy Douglas and others were formulating that, we would not have had that particular legislation and perhaps we would not have had the great country that we have today.

The equalization formula is part of the overall role of the federal government. It gives every province the ability to offer comparatively equal services at comparatively similar rates of taxation. It is controversial. A number of changes have been made in the program over the past two or three years. There are elements of unfairness and it depends on which way one is looking at it as to whether the glass is half full or half empty.

I know Ontario is now an equalization-receiving province, which is unfortunate, but if there is any element of unfairness, this should be worked out in this House.

• (1235)

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is good to see you in the chair.

As this is my first time speaking in this session I would like to take a moment to thank my constituents for expressing their confidence by again electing me to be their voice in the House of Commons. It is a great honour to stand here in this historic chamber on their behalf and I will continue to work hard to represent them in the way they so much deserve.

I would also like to take this time to thank my campaign team, the many volunteers and Brian and Karen particularly who came out time and time again to work hard to get me to where I am today. I could not have done it without their support and their unending dedication. I am greatly moved and touched by how many people stepped forward to show me their support in various ways through this past election. I thank them all and tell them that their hard work did not and will not go unnoticed.

Most important, I would like to thank my wife, Geri, and the rest of the family. Without their love and support I would not be here today. Geri has not only been my best friend but a great campaigner and member of the team, a fact for which I am forever grateful.

I would like to welcome back my friends and colleagues and, at the same time, welcome and congratulate all the new members of the House of Commons. I wish them all the best as they start their great adventure of serving their communities and constituents. It is a great and honourable responsibility that they have been given. May they never forget this. I look forward to meeting and working with all of them in the future.

I am honoured to have the opportunity to speak to the Speech from the Throne delivered by Her Excellency last week. I stand here today in support of the speech and I would like to take a few moments to share with the House why I feel this way.

I represent the riding of Elgin—Middlesex—London which is situated in the very heart of southwestern Ontario. The riding can best be described as a large rural and agricultural area complemented with a very large industrial base and large automotive sector. With this in mind, I can tell the House how much the Speech from the Throne outlines the many areas important to these communities.

Manufacturing and automotive has been the strength of the area for a long time. One of the major problems facing my riding today is the recent announcement of the impending closure of the Sterling truck plant and so many other plants with scheduled layoffs in St. Thomas and surrounding areas. This announcement hit close to home as I have many friends and neighbours who will be affected by this and other economic activities.

I am pleased to see that our government is suggesting steps to further aid these industries. All of the automotive and manufacturing sectors and even more so now are under increasing strain.

The government recognizes the strategic importance of the Canadian manufacturing sector, especially in light of the challenging financial conditions and global competitiveness that they face. To show our support, the Government of Canada has implemented many measures, including the automotive innovation fund. This fund supports strategic and large-scale research and development projects in the automotive sector.

We will also continue to work with our provincial partners to ensure that the federal measures remain aligned with the needs of the manufacturing sector. We are taking steps to encourage skilled trades and apprenticeships and supporting workers facing transition in these times of economic uncertainty. Our government has outlined in the Speech from the Throne that it will take steps to ensure that the existing programs and services are as effective as possible in meeting the needs of Canadians.

Targeted help will be available to those who need it most. Our constituency offices continue to receive many letters and emails from people who are currently facing the troubling times and employment changes. An example comes to mind. A fellow named Doug who works at the Sterling plant is faced with the plant closing. He has been employed there for 16 years and likely thought he would work there for many more. He has been a welder for 11 years. However that is the job he has done at the plant. He has no certification as a welder. We are working very hard now to try to match the skills that Doug possesses to a certificate that says he has those skills so he can move on in these trying times and find other employment.

Helping Canadians and helping my constituents who are facing transition at this time is important. Our economy will only remain as strong as our workers and our families. Communities are made up of these families and these workers. The strength shown by individuals collectively make a community.

The Address

I would like to talk a little about the community of St. Thomas, my hometown. I was at a couple of events there this weekend. Friday night was the United Way event where we were doing a roast for a fellow who had been involved in the community for as long as he has been there. He is the local funeral director, so it was very easy to stand and roast him on Friday night. One could think of some of things that may have been said. Al Hughson is his name and he has been involved in the United Way for as long as I can remember. We roasted him well.

● (1240)

I would like to tell a little side story. CBC-Radio was in town taping and doing interviews, which there has been a lot of lately in my home town, on the different plant closures and what has been happening. The interviewer came to me afterward and said that we had spent the whole night talking about what a great community guy Al is and how hard he has worked for the community but nobody mentioned the troubles facing the community. I said that those things go unnoticed in a community like this because we know we must pull together. I said that we know it is because of guys like Al and the other people who were in the room that night that the community has the strength that it has.

I met up with the interviewer again on Saturday night when she was doing more interviews with us as we judged the floats for the Santa Claus parade. We were looking at one of the largest parades and one of the largest turnouts I have ever seen in St. Thomas, especially when the economy is not all that great. It was great to see it. While we were judging some of the floats, it was amazing to see how many of the manufacturing facilities and their employees still pulled together and had some of the best looking floats. They were still out there working for their community. As we rode down Main Street in a horse-drawn wagon, and I do apologize to the horses, the people were 10 deep on each side of the street. The Santa Clause parade is a special time and the kids' smiles are quite incredible, but I knew, looking at the kids and their smiles, that behind each of those children are parents who have quite a bit of strain because their employment is not as certain as it might be. However, that is what the community is about and that is how we work together as a community.

Like other communities in southern Ontario, we look to other things that the government has done. The community development trust supports initiatives such as jobs training and skills development and creating opportunities for affected workers. Community transition plans foster economic development and create new jobs, infrastructure development and plans to stimulate economic diversification.

To encourage, support and assist these individuals entering skilled trades and apprenticeships, our government has created many incentives to help people excel in these areas. Some of the incentives our government has given to assist individuals are investing in the apprenticeship incentive grants and, through the apprenticeship, job creation tax credits. This encourages employers to hire apprentices. The government is investing \$3 billion in the new labour market agreements with the provinces to adjust the gap in labour market programming for those who do not currently qualify for training under the employment insurance program. During this time we will need to train many workers to transition to new and different

employment opportunities. This commitment complements the transfer of active employment insurance assistance and training measures and funding under the Employment Insurance Act to the provinces and territories to provide them with flexibility to focus on job training and employment support on local and regional market needs.

In the area of securing jobs for our families and communities, our government is making strong commitments to keep our families secure in their role as the backbone of our economy. Our government will continue to strengthen Canada's workforce for the future by carrying on in our support of student financial assistance.

We may see a different face on students as we move a forward, specifically in some areas of southern Ontario. As people go back for retraining and people move on to different places in their lives from the employment situations they were in, we will see that the face of a student may not be the typical face that we are used to seeing and we will need to train these workers to move on and transition from one job to another.

While families are struggling with financial difficulties due to global economic crises, there will still be the need to make education decisions for their family. In budget 2008, we committed to streamlining and modernizing the Canada student loans program. We also proposed a new consolidated student grant program. This exciting new program will assist those families who struggle with the costs of higher education.

Part of making these programs effective means continuing to work together with stakeholders, the provinces and the territories, and we are committed to doing this.

My riding also has a very vibrant seniors population. We have seniors who are both young and old but mostly young. Seniors are a vital part of the community. They know that our government has their best interests at heart and will work hard to ensure their financial security, especially during this time of global economic uncertainty.

● (1245)

Last year the government provided close to \$5 billion in tax relief for seniors and pensioners. Our government doubled the allowable pension income amount, increasing the age limit for maturing their pensions and registered retirement savings plans from age 69 to 71. It introduced pension income splitting for seniors and pensioners. This is probably the one most oft talked about policy change that we made in the last year. Certainly it is the one people who visit us in the office talk about the most.

In budget 2008 we increased the guaranteed income supplement exemption benefit to low and modest income seniors who chose to continue working. As I said before, there are many young seniors in my riding.

The Address

Because of my riding's makeup, it is also faced with dealing with energy, the environment and agriculture. We have put those three together and it has become a very good marriage. Energy security is the main priority for our government and in the riding of Elgin—Middlesex—London my constituents have taken many steps in the area to develop cleaner and more beneficial energy sources.

A very large wind farm has been developed on the north shore of Lake Erie. It has over 60 turbines and is currently generating megawatts of good, clean wind energy. This summer some MPs and congress people from the other side of the lake came to a look at it. Here is a case where we are ahead. The other side of the lake came to see what Canada was doing, which was a good thing to see.

A congresswoman from Ohio made a great statement. I would love to steal it from her, so I will. She said that Lake Erie was in fact the Saudi Arabia of wind. We are happy that our side is using our wind and we welcome the United States to share it with us and use the wind from their side too.

Eco-energy for a renewable power initiative is providing \$1.5 billion to support the development of renewable energy sources, such as wind, biomass, small hydro, solar and geothermal. This program directly benefits the riding in the areas of wind and solar energy. Many jobs and opportunities will open up as a result of our government supporting the security of our energy.

In Dorchester, a small community in the north part of the riding, there is a company called EnerWorks that is really riding the wave. It uses solar power to heat water. It is now selling its projects and products throughout Canada and creating less energy usage by using solar power to create hot water in homes.

This weekend it was announced that a group just south of London was putting together a solar farm. It is using an agricultural area but laying it out as a solar farm to collect electricity.

The great thing about the Speech from the Throne is it outlines many ways for Canadians to participate in bettering their economic future. I have just shared some examples of them. Canada is built on a promise of opportunity, the chance to work hard, raise a family and make a better life. The government will work hard to break down the barriers that prevent Canadians from reaching their full potential. We will continue to help families, the backbone of maintaining and securing a strong economy.

We also talked about other clean energy and agriculture in the riding. An ethanol plant has recently opened in the town of Aylmer, the south part of the riding. It makes ethanol from corn. It is clean fuel grown by local farmers. The grand opening is in December. It is brand new and starting its first batches of ethanol. The government is helping farmers produce energy with what they grow on the land. Farmers are returning a profit for growing good crops and clean energy to go into vehicles because of it. It is a good mix and it works well in the riding.

Elgin—Middlesex—London is a great place to raise a family. I raised mine there. Everyone has left, except for my wife and I. The strength is families. I mentioned earlier the parade and how families were pulling together. In the Speech from the Throne we promise to improve the universal child tax benefit and to take measures to increase access to maternity and parental benefits to small business.

I am a small businessman. I have trouble using the word “small”, but as a small businessman it is important that the government helps. Small business is the driver of the economy in an awful lot of areas of our country and the importance of government helping exists.

We have acted on helping families care for loved ones with disabilities. We will assist Canadians in buying their first homes. We have extended the homelessness partnering strategy. We have also helped more Canadians find affordable housing.

● (1250)

Last, but certainly not least, we have taken creative measures to tackle heart, lung and neurological diseases and build on the work of the Mental Health Commission. Canadians have renewed their confidence in our government and we are committed to direct all of our energy towards addressing the challenge. Canadian families face these challenges day in and day out. We will need to work together to do that.

Crime and security is still an issue even in rural southern Ontario. Keeping Canadians safe is a priority, not only in the area of economic uncertainty but in their homes and their communities. We have promised to take tough action against crime and work with partners to improve the administration of justice. We will strengthen legal provisions in key areas such as youth crime, organized crime and gang violence. We will focus gun laws on ending smuggling and strong penalties for use of guns in crimes, while at the same time not criminalizing law-abiding farmers. We will make Canada's criminal justice system more efficient and assure citizens that justice is served and served swiftly.

The safety of our families and communities is our main priority. Victims must be the ones supported by the criminal justice system, not the criminals. In light of the current global instability, our government has made plans to accelerate some of our initiatives. For example, our government has budgeted \$33 billion for infrastructure. We have reached agreements with all 13 provinces and territories and are working with them and municipal leaders around the country to ensure we get the job done. Our government is committed to expediting the building Canada plan to ensure that these projects are prompt and that our promises to our communities are delivered as quickly as possible.

As members have heard throughout this speech, the throne speech draws a plan that will help Elgin—Middlesex—London, a plan that will help Ontario and a plan that will help Canada. This is a plan that also offers hope to families and communities. This is Canada's plan for moving forward.

The Address

As was touched upon many times in the speech, this is a time for working together at all levels of government and with everyday citizens. We must join hands and face this together. The solution is there for us and our combined efforts will make it happen.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on his success. I am glad to see him back raising issues that matter to all of us.

As a fellow representative from Ontario, I am quite concerned with the vagueness in many parts of the throne speech at a time when Canadians are clearly looking for some very direct help and assistance. In particular, a concern that I expect we both share is the auto sector, an area that we know affects thousands and thousands of jobs, thousands of people, thousands of families throughout Canada, especially in Ontario, which is suffering immensely right now.

I am interested to hear my fellow colleague's comments on what he thinks should be done for the auto industry, given the fact that as of today we still have not heard specifically what will be done to help the auto sector in Canada.

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, I welcome my colleague back to the House as well.

She is right. I spent a great deal of time since the election, and even during the election, talking to auto workers. Many of them are in my riding and many families are connected through the auto industry. It is not a made in St. Thomas problem. It is not a made in Elgin—Middlesex—London problem. It is not a made in Ontario problem. It is not even a made in Canada problem. It is a made in North America problem. It may be even greater than that, but let us at least stop at North America.

The answers to the problem are out there, but we need to work together to solve it. Last week the Minister of Industry spent time in Washington with the industry minister from the province of Ontario at his side, working together on the problem. That is the answer. This is not a top-down solution. It cannot be. I do not think it will work that way. We will have to work together with the province.

The United States is working on the problem at the same time. It has sent away the presidents of the Detroit three, asking them to come back with a plan with which it can help. That is a great first start, but I am not sure we can start the solution. The solution has to start collectively, and we have to work together with it.

• (1255)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I welcome my colleague back as well.

As a small business owner myself prior to Parliament, I share some of his concerns over the direction of government.

I hope the trip to Washington by the Industry minister and his partner in Ontario was not seen as a success. They did not meet with a single senior legislator who has any influence on what is happening with the auto industry in the United States. They could have accomplished more by simply meeting in Toronto rather than spending taxpayer dollars to go to Washington to sit with staffers.

The problem may not have been created in Elgin—Middlesex—London or St. Thomas and other places, but the deregulation philosophy that his government purports is the very one that put us

in this trouble in the first place. It is the one that leaders in Europe and other parts of the world are saying needs to be revised, yet the Prime Minister made a speech in South America just this past week that echoed President Bush's same sentiments of keeping on the same track on which we have been going. Remedying the problem with the same issues that put us here in the first place is no remedy at all.

Is the member's government willing to consider a reform of our regulatory instruments so we can avoid future crises in the marketplace and in investment cycles? Surely his government has played some role in the collapse of this economy and contributed to the one around the world.

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, I welcome the member back to the House also.

He made a very good point. There is plenty of room to spread the blame, but that also means there are plenty of hands to help with the solution and that is truly at what we are looking.

In my speech I talked about how communities pulled together when asked. We have seen Canadians pull together and fix problems. We have seen Canadians from all walks of life work together to solve problems. We saw it during the BSE crisis. Canadians buckled down and said that they would buy beef even though there was a Canadian beef problem, and they did. That really helped.

In the last two months Canadians have said that the auto sector is in a little trouble. What are Canadians doing? They are buying more cars this year than last year. In an absolutely terrible economic time, they are buying more cars. That is the way Canadians work together to help to solve the problem.

We recognize the problem. As the member mentioned, even leaders in Europe recognize the same problem. The automotive industry is in a worldwide crisis, not just in North America.

I am not sure the solution can come from one little place in Ottawa. The solution has to come by all of us working together.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Congratulations on your appointment, Mr. Speaker. I wish my hon. colleague congratulations as well.

I will make this question very quick.

The member talked about community. I can certainly sympathize and empathize with him. I have over 200 communities in my riding, the largest of which is only 13,000 people, so I know what he talks about when he means community spirit.

I have a question, however, on the community trust fund.

The Address

The member zeroed in on retraining. He talked about the fact that people needed to be retrained in instances of economic downturns. Many people in the fisheries in my area are between the ages of 55 and 60. I am sure many in industries like forestry in his riding are going through the same situation. How does he feel not about retraining, but about an early retirement program that would give these people the dignity to ease their way out of the workforce and allow more young people in to the workforce? It frees it up for younger generations.

My question is not about retraining. If my colleague talks about that, I would sooner he sit down and we can go on to someone else. I would rather he talk about transitioning people out of the workforce and in to retirement.

• (1300)

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor is a fantastic riding.

What I did not mention anywhere in my speech, and I would like to get a plug in for it, is our fantastic commercial fishery on the north shore of Lake Erie. Therefore, we do not like to forget the other fishermen in Canada.

As I said in my speech, many seniors live in my riding, both young and old. I do not like to ever speak for them as to which age they feel on a particular day. To answer the member's question about early retirement, those who want to will and those who do not will carry on doing productive work or community work, and we will love having them do it.

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London has given a very insightful overview with respect to retraining and linking it, for example, in the technology areas, ethanol and wind farms. Certainly, coming from a manufacturing community with Sterling Truck, I appreciate that linking of opportunity and training with the changing economy.

My question is more in the area of the trades. We have had quite a bit of experience with the Construction Trades Association, with pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship training, but not much was in the throne speech on the rehabilitation of old apartment buildings, new construction starts and more affordable housing. The linkage argument still carries. If we are to train young people, they have to be in the market, and then there is availability and supply and demand. Would he like to comment further? Does he see the government, in its budget, coming forward with more emphasis on housing?

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, we talked about the labour market agreements with the provinces. Some retraining certainly happens through them.

I love the idea of linking the trade system to the building of affordable housing. In my case, another one I would love is to use the training in the preservation of historic buildings. We are losing some of the skills in stonemasonry and that type of thing and it is something else we could certainly work on. I hope that we can work together on that problem.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, congratulations on your appointment. I will be splitting my time with the member for Scarborough Southwest.

The Speech from the Throne has hit the nail on the head in that it told us that we are in a crisis. I have heard the word “recession” being used in speeches made by the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister, and that we are theoretically in a recession.

What all of us need to do, therefore, is to come together. We all agree that the political parties should come together for the benefit of all Canadians. We must pull together in difficult times. This is not a time for political partisanship; it is a time for political parties to work together, to develop a clear plan and decide where we are going. I am making a positive statement. I think we would all like to work with the government to deal with this problem.

Many Canadians are going to be affected. Jobs are going to be lost. One of my colleagues mentioned housing. There are many people who still do not have housing. Middle-income families cannot find housing. People in rental housing are finding that as their landlords fix up their houses, their rent increases and suddenly they cannot afford to pay the rent and they are thrown out into the streets. There is a need. When jobs are lost, people lose their homes. An increased number of people need housing.

Some of the social needs will have to be discussed as we talk about what we are going to do in this crisis, the needs of people who lose their jobs, how they are going to get their kids to school, how they are going to put food on the table, and how they are going to put a roof over their heads. That is an important piece, and that linkage was missing in the Speech from the Throne.

I do not want to say that I told them so, but I think we told members of the government about two years ago that this was going to happen. Everyone saw the writing on the wall. One does not have to be an economics professor to see the writing on the wall that the manufacturing sector is going down.

As of January 2007 in my own province of British Columbia 45 mills had closed in the forestry industry. That means that whole towns like Mackenzie, where 4,500 people live and were totally dependent on the 1,500 people who worked in that mill, now have nothing. People have walked away from their homes because they cannot sell them. They cannot give their homes away. Ghost towns are being created in my part of the world. We saw this happening way back in 2007.

Questions were asked in the House about what we would do for the automobile sector and the loss of jobs in that sector and the loss of jobs in forestry. No one is blaming anyone for the loss of jobs in forestry. The pine beetle has created a great deal of the problem, and it is not something we can fix. It will take about 75 to 100 years to rebuild the forest that has been decimated by the pine beetle. It is not as if we could sell any prop-up to the forestry sector in British Columbia.

We might be able to assist the automobile sector. I think we should seriously consider what we do, because we cannot afford the loss of jobs. When people lose jobs, the government has to spend money, through employment insurance and social assistance to help them with all of their needs. It is not in anyone's best interest to see jobs being lost in this country, never mind the human tragedy of people not having work and not being able to take care of themselves and their families.

The Address

This was known. It was known that job losses were happening. Questions were asked over and over again. We were told, "Don't worry, be happy. It is not a big problem. It will look after itself. Things are fine".

We also saw much spending. The government's actual income was going down, but the spending was increasing. Anyone over 10 years old knows that if we spend more money than we have in our hands, we are going to get into a deficit. We have seen this happen.

Having said I told them so, I think we need to talk about what we do. The government cannot continue to blame this solely on the collapse of global markets and on the problems that are going on around the world. There was a lack of foresight, a lack of vision and a lack of ability to strike when we saw things happening so that this would not come to pass.

This country was lucky. We had strong economic fundamentals. Before the Conservative government came into power, we had had nine balanced budgets. There was a \$3 billion contingency fund that was set aside for a rainy day. Why did the Liberal government set aside money for a rainy day? We had seen the peso crisis. We had seen the Asian flu occur. We had watched SARS. We had seen 9/11. The government had to find money suddenly to deal with these emergencies.

● (1305)

That taught us to put aside some money. We all know we need to put aside money for a rainy day. If we have spent the money that we had put aside for a rainy day and then it rains, we get very wet. The problem when a government mismanages the economy is that it is not government that gets into trouble, it is Canadians.

Government coffers can be written on a piece of paper, and there can be talk about deficits and balance sheets, et cetera. For ordinary Canadians, however, the reality is that they lose their jobs, they have no money, they cannot find work, and they do not know what to do. These are the hardships we are talking about. There is a need to be not only fiscally responsible and to manage the economy well for reasons of suggesting that the government is a good manager, but also to protect citizens.

We need to talk about where we go from here. Unfortunately the Speech from the Throne was short on a plan. Those of us on this side of the House would like to see a plan. We would like to see a comprehensive, integrated, immediate medium- and long-term plan that says that we are going to move forward. We cannot go back and do some of the same old things that were done in the past.

We are moving into a new industrial revolution, a different kind of revolution. Canada is a small nation of only 32 million people. There is absolutely no way we can compete with huge populations such as those in the European Union, Asia, India and China. We cannot compete. We do not have enough workforce to do the kinds of manufacturing jobs that are going to those areas, because in some countries people can still be paid \$5 an hour and make a living, have a home and feed their families. That cannot be done here.

We have to think about where we must go. We have to think about how we can become smart. We are moving, as most countries such as ours have, passed the industrial revolution and into the 21st century. We need to move into what is known as the new, creative,

innovative economies. It is the new, creative, innovative revolution. To do that, we have to consider what we must spend on in order to build for tomorrow. As everyone knows, we need to have emergency money to prevent people from falling through the cracks and to invest in new economies. The question is how we can do that.

We need to look at things such as arts and culture. The Conference Board has said that last year, the creative economy, and arts, culture and film are part of that, directly and indirectly put \$84.6 billion into the gross domestic product of this country. That is a little over 7.4% of the GDP. It created 1.1 million jobs, not only directly in the arts and culture industries themselves, but in the spinoffs of tourism, restaurants and other service and retail industries that help people generate more income and more jobs.

Yet we saw the short-sightedness of the government in cutting this economy, and economy which a country such as Canada is going to have to look at moving forward into. Today the arts and culture industries are not merely about acting on a stage, making music, creating CDs or creating films. It is also about the technology that comes with that. We all know that digitization, iPods and everything that we look at in the new technologies have been spun out of the creative economy. They have been developed and spun out of arts and culture.

The important thing about arts and culture is that at a time when we need to band together, it is an important tool for social networking. We heard today that people must come together and that Canadians will rise to the occasion. Yes, we know that Canadians will rise to the occasion, but in order to rise to the occasion, spend money, buy more cars, and keep the economy afloat, people have to have money to spend. If they do not have jobs, they do not have money to spend.

We are prepared, on this side of the House, to work to make sure that we create the necessary safety net and a long-term plan, but we would like to see a plan. We are asking for a plan, a real plan, a substantive plan that we can look at, that we can critique, that we can agree with or disagree with. However, there needs to be some scaffolding to hang our hats on, to be able to build something new.

We cannot wait any longer. We now have the problem. We could have prevented the problem, or at least buffeted it better. We did not, so let us not cry over spilled milk, but I would ask the government to please give us a plan that we can work with and see where we go for the benefit of all Canadians.

● (1310)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for a very well thought out speech.

The member is very interested in the forestry and cultural industry. She mentioned that the current situation could have been avoided. Canada could have buffered this R word, the recession word, had there been good economic policies.

The Address

The Parliamentary Budget Officer stated that the current government spent \$40 billion more than it received in revenue and this was due to bad economic policies and tax gimmicks. Could the member tell me how the good people of British Columbia, the people in the forestry industry, will be able to buffer this recession now that we do not have a \$3 billion contingency reserve that the Liberals had when they were in power?

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, when the Liberals were in government, we had discussed that the pine beetle was a fact and that there was nothing we could do to roll back that problem with the forest gone. We had talked about setting up new economies for the people in that part of British Columbia. We had talked about developing the economies and working with the communities. Many of them had ideas to look at new economic technology, to move into service industries, and to do other things so that people who could not rely on the forestry industry any more for the next 75 years would be able to move forward.

No one is asking for a bailout for the forestry industry. We are asking to give people the human capital, to get the retraining the people need, put some money into creating new technology and new economies for the people in that area. They are very innovative people. They want to work and they have plans to do this. I have seen the plans. The plans have been there for two years.

The government has said in both of its budgets in 2006 and 2007 that it was going to put money into this. That money has not arrived. The money is not there. We could have prevented that. That was three years ago. Things could have been done then so that people would be ready when a crash hits and they would have some work. They would be able to start building anew. We do not just suddenly react when a crisis comes. We have to deal with it beforehand if we see it coming. At least that is what I think, as a physician, one should do, and that is what one tends to do.

• (1315)

Mrs. Michelle Simson (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to rise in the House of Commons for the first time and respond to the Speech from the Throne.

Please allow me to begin by thanking the constituents of Scarborough Southwest for their support and confidence in electing me as their representative to the House of Commons. It is an honour and a privilege to serve them.

I also want to thank my campaign manager, Pierre Cyr, and Earl Provost, my campaign chair, who mobilized a team of fabulous volunteers. Their dedication and hard work made this day possible. In addition, thanks to my many friends and family for their support.

Finally, I would like to thank the two most important men in my life: my son Eric, and my husband George, who has been there for me every day. Not only is he my best friend, but his love and support was instrumental in my being elected to this honourable House.

While the official opposition has signalled it will not defeat the throne speech, it is not because it contains a plan to deal with our country's current crisis, but because our country needs a cooperative and collaborative Parliament to effectively deal with the serious challenges we are facing.

In fact, as a new member, I am disappointed in the past policies of the government that contributed to the economic instability we are experiencing, and the fact there now appears to be no plan to restore Canadians' confidence in our economy.

The Speech from the Throne focuses heavily on preparing Canadians for the difficult times ahead. Due to Conservative mismanagement of the economy, we are indeed facing very difficult times.

The government did not just inherit a \$12 billion surplus from the previous Liberal government, it inherited a multi-year Liberal legacy of fiscal prudence and balanced budgets. In two and a half short years, the Conservatives managed to not only squander this sizeable cushion, but also destroy the culture of strong fiscal management that the Liberals, in partnership with all Canadians, had worked so hard to create and maintain.

Even with the benefit of hindsight, the Conservative government is unwilling to admit that its policy decisions played no small role in where Canadians now find themselves.

The previous Liberal government understood that in a global economy, meaningful tax reductions for all Canadians, measured in consistent national debt reduction and a viable contingency plan, can insulate Canadians to many economic woes that start beyond our borders and are not within our control.

Governments, fundamentally, have a responsibility to its citizens to be prepared for such circumstances, to ensure that Canada is in the best possible position to meet these unforeseen challenges. The previous Liberal government understood this and successfully managed Canada through a number of crises by prudently maintaining budget surpluses.

During the election, triggered by the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister vowed that Canada would never fall into deficit. Now that the election is over, the Prime Minister has issued dire warnings to Canadians that a deficit is not only unavoidable but may be economically the only option available for Canada.

The government is claiming it foresaw this economic downturn over a year ago. If that is the case, why did the Prime Minister make a commitment to all Canadians just five short weeks ago to never fall into deficit if he knew that promise could never be fulfilled?

Canada ran a deficit for the first three months this year, and as the Speech from the Throne so clearly points out, we are headed into deep deficit once again. This deficit is not the result of the global credit crisis but the direct result of choices made by the government. It was the Conservatives' choice to increase spending to the point that the government has become the highest spending government in Canadian history. It was its choice to cut taxes in a manner that has eroded our tax base.

The Address

•(1320)

As the independent Parliamentary Budget Officer, Kevin Page, said in his report, “The weak fiscal performance to date is largely attributable to previous policy decisions as opposed to weakened economic conditions”. This analysis is coming from the Prime Minister's own appointee and clearly flies in the face of the story the Prime Minister is trying to sell. This is a fact that has negatively impacted all Canadians.

I also find it disturbing that the Speech from the Throne failed to acknowledge the issues facing Canada's most disadvantaged, the people who will be hardest hit by the downturn in the Canadian economy. It makes no provision for Canadians living in poverty, including some 800,000 children.

Also ignored by the government is the issue of affordable child care. It is not surprising, considering the current government, with the help of the NDP, dismantled the previous Liberal government's national child care program. I am sure the government hoped this issue would fade away after deciding to cut cheques instead of dealing with this serious problem. A monthly cheque is not child care, nor does it create a single day care space. Hard-working families need safe, accessible and affordable child care.

The speech also fails to address the challenges faced by our seniors. Seniors who are financially crippled by the government's decision to tax income trusts are now having their savings ravaged again by the current economic crisis and they do not even merit a mention in the speech. We need a plan to protect our seniors.

There was no mention of poverty, child care or seniors. The government has a responsibility to help Canadians through the current crises: those who currently live in poverty, those who are on the edge of poverty, struggling working families, those who have already lost their jobs and the thousands who will as our economic crisis deepens.

The Conservative government's Speech from the Throne is simply an infomercial designed to sell Canadians on the idea it is not to blame for our current problems rather than what a throne speech should be, which is a blueprint for future economic prosperity, justice and fairness for all Canadians. Liberals understand that and Canadians understand that.

As a member of the official opposition, I understand that Canadians want Parliament to work together and in partnership with the provinces and municipalities from coast to coast to coast to effectively tackle the challenges facing our country. Liberals are committed to ensuring that Parliament takes action on the economy in a way that will best help Canada through these difficult times. Canadians deserve nothing less.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the hon. member on her maiden speech. She did a fabulous job. One would think she was a long-time member of Parliament.

As she rightly pointed out, there is nothing substantial in the Speech from the Throne. There is no plan. There is no plan because there is no money in the government coffers. That, as she rightly pointed out, is due to the fact that the Conservatives did not have a proper policy in place or that their policy was so ideologically driven

that they could not save for a rainy day, like the Liberals did. Therefore, they now have nothing. This is a made in Canada recession.

As members go door to door and talk to their constituents, what does the member think the trust factor is with the Prime Minister. He has broken every promise regarding the recession and he is now claiming there is going to be one. He claimed a week before the election there would be no recession. He was quoted at the Canadian Club that there would be no recession. Where is the trust factor?

•(1325)

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Mr. Speaker, right now there is no trust factor. I have been receiving emails from hundreds of my constituents with respect to the current economic crisis, particularly seniors. I am alarmed by the number of seniors who do believe that during this period they will lose their homes. These are hard-working people who provided the foundation for our economy over the past few years and they are seeing it frittered away. They do believe this was a made in Canada recession and they are concerned that there is no contingency fund.

As we all know and as most bankers and economists would point out to average families, we should always have a rainy day fund. Quite frankly, I think we are seeing a monsoon season.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I too, welcome the member to this august chamber. I think she will find this chamber to be a very rewarding experience.

I want to focus on the heart of her comments which hinged upon her allegation that our government somehow squandered the surpluses that we had. One could compare government to a family's finances. A family may have a line of credit at the bank or some other obligation that it must deal with but suddenly it finds itself with some extra money. It could set that money aside in a rainy day fund but the interest that would be paid on the rainy day fund would be less than what the family would be paying on its line of credit.

The sensible thing to do, the thing that I and thousands of families across Canada do when they have some extra money, such as a bonus from their employer, is to apply it to their line of credit where the interest rate is higher.

Unfortunately, the member did not even mention the fact that our government actually paid off \$40 billion in public debt. Basically we paid off money against the mortgage that would have saddled future generations. It was very responsible.

I would ask the member to comment on how she can allege that money was squandered when \$40 billion was paid off against the national mortgage.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Mr. Speaker, as a former banker, I do agree with debt reduction but I do not believe that Canada's debt, before the surplus was used to pay it down, was unmanageable.

The Address

My constituents have likened it to two people who get married and buy a house. They take out a mortgage and sacrifice everything. They have no life and they have nothing of consequence. They want to pay off the mortgage but in the meantime they have no quality of life. They cannot maintain the house when the roof gets leaky or the foundation falls apart. At the end of the day, the mortgage is paid off but the house needs to be razed. They then must go back into debt to rebuild it at today's prices.

The easy answer to the member's question is that debt reduction is not the only thing that is absolutely critical in this country and I think we are living it now.

● (1330)

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time today with the hon. member for Welland.

I would like to thank the constituents of Thunder Bay—Superior North for electing me to represent them in Parliament. It is a great honour and an even greater responsibility. After over 30 years of working for myself in my own small businesses, I now work for my constituents, many thousands of them.

I would also like to thank the Thunder Bay New Democrat volunteers who never stopped working hard for NDP representation in our riding since the days the hon. Ernie Epp and the hon. Iain Angus diligently served this House.

I especially would like to thank my wonderful family, Margaret and Michael Hyer, who offered unflinching support over five years and three elections.

Northwestern Ontario helped to supply the raw materials that built Ottawa, Montreal and Toronto: furs, timber and materials that helped to build a prosperous Canada, but it is northern Ontario now that needs help from Ottawa. Our citizens and our small towns feel forgotten. We feel that in our time of need, Ottawa has forgotten where we are, who we are and what we need.

As I knocked on thousands of doors over five years, I heard a lot of anger and a lot of worry. Thousands and thousands of resource jobs have been lost in northern Ontario, mostly in forestry, woodlands and mills. I heard anger and extreme worry in the forest-dependent towns whose mills and woods operations have closed, like Longlac, Nakina, Beardmore, Red Rock, Nipigon and many of the mills in Thunder Bay. Others are on the edge, like Terrace Bay, Marathon, and the two remaining mills in Thunder Bay.

Since October 14, I have been hard at work on many issues related to making life better for families in our region. Some examples include fostering value-added forestry, exploring potential energy from wood opportunities and meetings on regional issues related to mining, health care, highways, freight rail service to Greenstone and bringing back VIA Rail to Thunder Bay and the Lake Superior north shore.

My assistants are already working hard in Thunder Bay on helping many of our citizens with their local needs. However, many of the needs of northwestern Ontario can only be met by this House and by our federal government working together to invest, to create

and to re-create healthy communities, families, the environment and the economy.

In our riding, more than 20% of our citizens are members of first nations. We want them to have more than mere payoffs for residential schools. We want them to join the economic and political fabric of Canada.

Many others in our riding are Métis. These descendants of the fur trade marriages want to be recognized at the federal table.

In our riding of Thunder Bay—Superior North, we have a cultural oasis in a sea of wilderness. We have, per capita, more symphony seats than Toronto. We have more seats at live theatre per capita than Montreal. We have a fine visual arts scene from aboriginal art to traditional art, to avant-garde; eye-popping works. We have those because our citizens and our previous governments helped us to build a cultural foundation. Let us please not cut arts funding. Let us increase it so that arts in Thunder Bay, northwestern Ontario and all across rural Canada can continue to grow.

In Thunder Bay—Superior North, we have skilled, hard-working craftspeople, tradespeople, a labour force with experience and flexibility. We need support for innovation, for finding new ways to make new products from our forests. We do give thanks for the investments in Thunder Bay for molecular medicine and technologies.

Not everyone will get back to work. We need the government to protect their pensions, their homes and their savings, if they are pushed into retirement, through both wise investments and stringent regulations. If they are laid off in mid-career, we want an EI system that serves and protects them, not a system that adds layer after layer of regulations to avoid paying them so that the finance minister can balance his books. We must stop taking the workers' money from EI. It is their money, not the government's.

● (1335)

As in pretty much every riding in Canada, just over half of the citizens in my riding are women. They want the status of women office back. They want respectful attention to both equity and equality.

In our riding, about 35% of us do not have a family physician, myself included. Persons in need of many services must fly to Winnipeg, Toronto or Hamilton for treatment. Persons in need of psychiatric services get brief diagnoses in pills, not time and therapy and healing.

The Address

When Tommy Douglas and Lester Pearson worked together to create our then marvellous health care system, it was funded 50% federally. Today the federal share is well below 20%. We need the federal level of government to restore its long abandoned promise to be equal partners with the provinces on health care.

If our Prime Minister tells us he cannot meet these needs due to the impending deficits, we urge that he retrieve some of the money he gave to his friends in the banks and the oil companies in huge tax breaks.

I have a special plea for the Minister of Industry. We have a specialized mill in Thunder Bay that makes fine printing papers. It is called Thunder Bay Fine Papers. Under previous absentee owners, it was mismanaged. It has been bought and reorganized under new management, local Thunder Bay management. It needs the help of the federal government. It and the families in Thunder Bay need the help of the Minister of Industry, perhaps through FedNor. It is a unique mill. It makes value-added speciality fine printing papers for books, magazines and high quality brochures. It is almost 100% Canadian owned with most of that ownership right in Thunder Bay. It has secured a special, favourable 10-year labour agreement with CEP union. It has dramatically improved its energy and labour efficiency. It has gone from 6.9 hours of labour per tonne of product under the previous owners down to 2.8 hours of labour per tonne, putting it into the top 25% of efficiency in North American mills, and it has several years of orders.

The Province of Ontario has stepped up to the place for the following assistance: a loan guarantee of \$25 million, a forgivable grant of \$1.5 million, as well, the Ontario Heritage Fund has contributed another \$1.5 million.

It is within the power of the Minister of Industry to save this mill. It is within his power to save over 600 direct jobs in a city of 108,000 people, as well as many hundreds of indirect jobs in Thunder Bay, plus securing many jobs at Bowater, also in Thunder Bay, which is the source for the Kraft pulp that goes into these fine papers. All told, it is within his power to save several thousand direct and indirect jobs in Thunder Bay, to save several thousand families in Thunder Bay from the hardship and worry this Christmas.

If the Minister of Industry, the Prime Minister and their government, whether through FedNor or through some other means, choose to show that they do care about value-added forest products, that they do care about forestry workers in northwestern Ontario and that they do believe that a targeted investment in Thunder Bay is important, then here is what is needed: first, a loan guarantee of between \$20 million and \$30 million for Thunder Bay Fine Papers to get it through its start-up cashflow crunch; second, that they direct our Canadian government agencies to buy from printers who specify Canadian produced fine papers, instead of the offshore papers often used at present.

I am a wildlife biologist. Biologists combine two strategies for saving endangered species. Second, we make a long-term plan for sustainability but first we move quickly for a short-term survival strategy to hold on to a dwindling population.

Mr. Speaker, please tell the Minister of Industry that we have an endangered forest industry in Canada with an especially endangered

population of forestry workers in Thunder Bay and northwestern Ontario. We urge him to show that his government does care about our forestry workers and does care about northwestern Ontario.

We need to move quickly to secure these jobs at Thunder Bay Fine Papers in Thunder Bay and in resource dependent communities across all of Canada.

Once again, allow me to express my pleasure at joining the House and I look forward to working with all parties to show that we can work together to reinvest in the kind of Canada that we all seek and that Canadians citizens want and need from us.

• (1340)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member and welcome him to the House. I also congratulate the people of Thunder Bay—Superior North for their wise choice in the election.

The question I have for my colleague is very specific to the mill he mentioned as a central piece to his first speech in the House, a central piece as it is not only symbolic but a practical example of what government can and cannot do.

The choices that are available to government in this time of economic upheaval are critical for people in his riding and many of our ridings across the country. The choices made between a \$50 billion tax cut or specific investments or helping seniors to protect their pensions are choices being made in this place right now.

As the fiscal update comes, the mini-budget, specifically for the people of Thunder Bay—Superior North, what will the member need to see to garner his support and the support of the people he represents, knowing the government is on task and is aware of the realities for people in northern Ontario and in communities like his across the country?

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Mr. Speaker, to reiterate, people in northwestern Ontario have lost faith in the Government of Canada. They have lost faith in the Conservative government. They believe that the Prime Minister does not care about the forest industry and forestry workers and seems not to care about the average worker in Canada. We hope that is an incorrect assumption on their part.

There is a real window of opportunity in Thunder Bay and northwestern Ontario for the government to demonstrate to the people of northwestern Ontario that it does care about their plight.

After helping to build a better Canada for several centuries, this is a microcosm of the situation in Canada today. Does the government care about the average worker or does it care only about large, multinational corporations in a so-called free market system?

The Address

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate our new friend from Thunder Bay—Superior North and welcome him to this place.

After hearing his first speech and his reference to the shocking lack of doctors in his community, it is similar across the country but it seems particularly terrible there.

We heard a lot of talk today about deficit and deficit spending. My colleague referred to the fact that corporate tax cuts for the big oil companies and banks were scheduled over the next number of years at the rate of about \$14 billion a year. It would probably be a good idea if the government rescinded those.

I heard him also talk about loan guarantees. On the weekend past, I was in the Dewildt Chrysler dealership in Hamilton East—Stoney Creek talking to the owners about the problems they were having. Earlier today a government member talked about the number of auto sales. Where the issue is for the folks in these businesses is the restocking of their vehicles. They have been selling in fairly large numbers, but they need the investment money for restocking, bringing in the next models that they are going to put on the market.

Another member spoke as well about the rate of unemployment being 6.1%. Those were figures well over a month and a half ago and I am sure they are dramatically worse. Could the member tell us if the figure has been dramatically worse in the last six weeks in his riding as it has in mine?

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Mr. Speaker, I do not know the hard numbers on unemployment in Thunder Bay—Superior North. I know that for northern Ontario, for northwestern Ontario, for the small communities throughout northwestern Ontario and for Thunder Bay we are well above the national average and the national average is well above what is acceptable in a modern economy.

We remain hopeful that there will be targeted investments in industries that can be renewed or created throughout the north to ensure stability, safety and confidence for the average citizen throughout northwestern Ontario.

• (1345)

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I also join in the growing chorus in congratulating you on your re-election to the chair. From the election last Tuesday, we heard a resounding call for more civility and decorum in the House and I am sure you will uphold this mandate.

I also join my fellow New Democrats in offering my congratulations to the Prime Minister, the leader of the official opposition and the leader of the Bloc. I would also at this time like to thank my constituents in Welland for their trust and faith in me to send me to this place to represent them. I will be forever in their debt and forever grateful.

I would also, at this time, like to take an opportunity to thank my family. When I came to this country as an immigrant child with my parents, my father had no work. We came from Glasgow. He was a ship worker. He came to this land to build ships. Within six months, he found himself without a job. The decision for him, my mother and the four children they had at that time, myself included, was “Do we stay in this great land or do we home?” My father's decision, which

was extremely hard because there was no other family here to support us, was to stay.

It is with regret that I stand in my place today unable to say these words to my father directly. He passed away one year ago of multiple sclerosis. However, the decision my father took all those years ago enabled me to be in this place. For my father and my mother, I will be forever grateful.

I have been married for 29 years and there has always been a partnership with Peggy and I and our three kids. I thank them for their support and their love over this time. Without that, it would not be as meaningful as it is today to be in my place.

For my fellow first time MPs, I am honoured to have been elected along with them. I look forward to rolling up my sleeves and getting down to the work that Canadians expect of us.

It is clear that we are now facing an economic crisis unlike anything we have ever seen in modern times and for some, I would dare venture to say, never seen before. We would have to look to our grandparents, perhaps even our great grandparents, for those members who are young, to get the history of what happened once before in our great country.

These are extremely troubling and very anxious times for Canadians, especially from my riding of Welland. Last Wednesday's Speech from the Throne was an opportunity for the government to set out a bold action plan for Canadians. Unfortunately, that did not happen.

Canadians are looking to Parliament to help alleviate and lessen the impact of the economic crisis we face today. To do this, we believe there are five priorities that we need to undertake.

First, the government needs to create an economic stimulus package to help protect and create jobs. If we want to head off something worse than a recession, we need to ensure that people are working and making money.

Second, we need to protect the pensions of those hard-working Canadians who built this country for us and allowed us to enjoy the fruits of that country. We need to ensure that their pensions are protected and that they never again slip into debt and into poverty.

Third, we need to immediately suspend the \$7.3 billion corporate tax cuts scheduled to take effect in 2009. It seems ludicrous to give away billions more to profitable corporations while the rest of the economy suffers. It seems to me that the least we can do is invest in our own folks, not invest in corporations that take a tax cut and head to Mexico, like John Deere.

Fourth, we want to see legitimate steps to fight climate change. Not only is this a potentially greater crisis than the one we face in the economy, but it can indeed be part of the solution and part of the remedy. By creating green collar jobs, we have the potential to help solve both our problems simultaneously, the economic crisis and the climate crisis.

The Address

Fifth, we need to bring in meaningful democratic reform and a more open, accountable and co-operative minority government. There is currently a democratic deficit in our country with millions of Canadians feeling left out of our electoral process. At the same time, we are looking for strong signals that this minority Parliament will be more productive and less divisive than the last one.

The five priorities are not outrageous. Nor are they unreasonable. We felt that by introducing some or all these issues we could work with the government in bringing about the solutions that ordinary Canadians are demanding of all of us.

● (1350)

Listening to the Speech from the Throne last Wednesday, I was pleased by a number of elements. I liked the overall tone of the speech. It was conciliatory and open to collaboration.

The Prime Minister mentioned that he wanted to work with the other parties in the House and asked for our suggestions. I believe our suggestions are meaningful. However, asking for advice and then not using it is like an empty promise. I suggest we find a way to make both sides of the House understand that if we are going to collaborate, it means listening to the other side.

I was enthused by the Speech from the Throne with regard to the development of a continental cap and trade system and the invitation to work with the government on an energy retrofit program was encouraging. We have been calling for these initiatives for a number of years. I look forward to seeing further details and hope to be able to support them.

Also, the new language around the new world-class research facilities is promising. Canada has first-class researchers and innovators and it is about time we harness that energy and innovation. Brock University and Niagara College, which are in my riding, are talking about new biochemical industries and bio industries. In fact, the president of Brock University is extremely enthused about it. I look forward to the innovation and this sense of working with new innovators who will come forward, as in the details in the Speech from the Throne.

While all this is well and good, most of the speech was shrouded in vague language with few details and an actual action plan. The Speech from the Throne is the action plan of the government. It is supposed to show the strategic direction of the government. Yet I did not get a sense of that last Wednesday. Canadians were hoping for more and New Democrats were expecting more.

Being an MP from southern Ontario, I was looking for details on how the government would address the growing instability in the manufacturing sector. One area was in the industrial heartland of Ontario, and I did not hear anything.

The crisis extends beyond the auto sector. In southern Ontario one looks at that sector and says "auto". To be truthful, that is not exactly honest or absolutely true. What is really true about that manufacturing heartland is that it is extremely diverse. The difficulty is we are seeing numerous industries fail, or left to fail or simply pack up and move on.

CanGro was an operation just outside my riding in the Niagara Peninsula. One of its largest products was canned fruit. The Niagara

Peninsula is synonymous with tender fruit. CanGro was the last canning factory east of the Rocky Mountains and it was let to slide away about four months ago. Now the peach growers in Niagara have nowhere to send their peaches. In fact, the peach trees have been torn out of the ground, producing no more peaches. That is a shame.

Also in my riding is a place called Horizon Milling. Most people would probably remember it better as Robin Hood flour. The new Horizon Milling decided to buy the corporation from Robin Hood. Its first act of business was to lock out its workers, demand concessions from its retirees and workers, left them out on the street for 15 months and closed it. It is an absolute shame. It was a mill that had been in operation for 60-some-odd years, where grandfathers, fathers and sons had worked one after another in Port Colborne. That is unfortunate.

My riding is in the fourth oldest region in the country. Seventy per cent of young folks under the age of 30 leave the region of Niagara because of their inability to find work. If we continue down the road that is plotted for us today, I am afraid perhaps all young people will leave Niagara to find opportunities elsewhere. We need to stop that hemorrhaging. We need to find a new path. We need to come up with ways to ensure the survival not only of the manufacturing industries that exist today in my riding, but to also start new ones, with new innovation technologies and new ways of employing them.

We need new ideas and a compromise from all parties. If the government is serious about cooperation, I suggest it work with all parties to come up with a made in Canada plan that will not only pull us through the current situation, but leave our country stronger and more competitive to deal with the new realities of the 21st century.

● (1355)

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was thrilled to listen to the member for Welland. I am excited that our region now has another strong advocate for the manufacturing sector, for jobs, and above all for workers and for pensions.

I was interested to hear the member touch on the John Deere plant. As we all know, John Deere was actually a profitable plant. It took the broad-based corporate tax cuts the government has been offering. It took that money, but nonetheless the profitable John Deere company closed its doors and sent the jobs to Mexico.

Clearly the thrust of the throne speech, which was all about offering an increase in broad-based corporate tax cuts, is not helping the companies that most desperately need the help. In fact, as members know, if a company is not making any profits, it is not paying any taxes, so it does not benefit from the tax cuts.

Statements by Members

I wonder if the member for Welland could elaborate a little further, because I know workers in his community of Welland have already been paying for the economic crisis we are in, much like ours in Hamilton. They have paid with their jobs. They have paid with their pensions. They have paid through inadequate access to EI, and of course they have paid to bail out the banks.

I think the member would agree that it is time to start helping out workers in Welland. Could he share some concrete examples of how we might be able to do that?

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right about the tax cuts. John Deere amassed those tax cuts and used them to ship its manufacturing facilities to Mexico. It shipped a few odd jobs to Wisconsin, but the vast majority went to Mexico.

John Deere had been in the city of Welland for close to 100 years. By its own admission it was highly profitable and highly efficient, with a great workforce. It said in a statement it issued last year that it had a commitment to Welland, yet within nine months it made another announcement to the effect that it was closing the door without any discussions with anyone. It did not even say thank you very much for the tax cuts before moving on.

I talked to a young couple. The husband worked at John Deere. They were in their late twenties or early thirties, not much older than my own children. They told me they had thought they had finally found a secure job in an agri-region, because John Deere was the shining star of the region. When all the other manufacturers were losing jobs, this one was actually hiring. What I saw on their faces was desperation. They were asking me, "What will we do? Where do we go next? What will become of us, our friends and our families when we have to leave?"

It is absolutely heart-wrenching to see a young family in that situation, wanting to stay in their community and to be close to their family. They want to raise their children so that the grandparents will have the opportunity to see those grandchildren. They are looking to us in this House to find ways for them to stay in their community by creating jobs for them and not letting them disappear, and not letting the John Deeres take the corporate tax cuts the Conservatives are giving them and head south to Mexico.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

NORTHERN ONTARIO EXCELLENCE AWARD

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on my first occasion to speak in this hon. chamber, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the constituents of the great Kenora riding for electing me.

I recently had the honour of presenting Larry Hope with the Northern Ontario Excellence Award for the Dryden Regional Training and Cultural Centre, which is located in the heart of the Kenora riding.

The centre was designed with the community in mind and recognizes the local paper mill and its wood products as the main industry in the region. It is the state of the art, innovative centre for

training and cultural events for the entire region. I presented the award at the FedNor-sponsored WoodWORKS! gala in Toronto which, through its successful funding relationship with the Canadian Wood Council, promotes Canadian wood products through various programs and services focused on creating market access and demand.

Congratulations to the Dryden Regional Training and Cultural Centre for its commitment to excellence in serving the Kenora riding.

* * *

● (1400)

FRANK LEDWELL

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the late Frank Ledwell and to recognize his outstanding contribution to the community of Prince Edward Island.

Frank was a renowned author, teacher and former poet laureate who was dedicated to celebrating and promoting the lives of Islanders. Frank's work was honoured by many distinguished awards, including the Order of Prince Edward Island. In 2004 he was appointed provincial poet laureate for three years.

Frank grew up during the Depression, began his teaching career at the age of 16 and continued to work with the arts community throughout his lifetime. Through his kindness, goodwill and humour he inspired all whom he met. First and foremost was his family. Frank Ledwell enriched the lives of his students, his colleagues and his friends. His work will continue to inspire writers, and the attitude and encouragement he instilled in others will continue to make the world a better place.

* * *

[Translation]

ASSOCIATION QUÉBEC-FRANCE IN GRANBY

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this November, Granby's Association Québec-France will celebrate its 30th anniversary. This association has had great success in its goal of extending the government-to-government relations between France and Quebec into civil society. Because of successive presidents who believed in their association, 500 young people have been able to spend time in France gaining experience in harvesting, renovating castles, farming and numerous group outings.

The association also organized the first Semaine de la France and Semaine de la Francophonie, which included the 2004 Franco-Fête. Its members have also organized seminars, conferences, concerts, art shows, French fashion shows, contests and culinary events.

Speaking personally and on behalf of my Bloc Québécois colleagues, I would like to offer our best wishes to the Association Québec-France in Granby and wish it a long life.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are happy to see that gas prices have dropped. When I left Ottawa last Thursday, I noticed that gas cost approximately 75¢ per litre. However, in my riding, gas prices are higher. On Friday, gas in Elliot Lake cost 20% more than it did in Ottawa.

[English]

Most of my constituents have no choice but to drive long distances to get to work and to attend medical appointments, as there is little to no public transportation available to them. I continue to hear from frustrated constituents about unfair gas prices from Manitouwadge to Blind River, from Hearst to Kapuskasing and down to Little Current. They are tired of being gouged at the pumps.

New Democrats are asking for the creation of an investigation and prosecution office to deal with gas gouging. Canadians deserve a price monitoring agency with real teeth to ensure them fairness at the pumps no matter which region they live in.

* * *

MUNICIPAL HERITAGE LEADERSHIP

Mrs. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in the House to recognize the accomplishment of the beautiful town of Aurora, the southern half of my riding, which is the 2008 recipient of the prestigious Prince of Wales Prize for Municipal Heritage Leadership.

The town of Aurora has a beautiful downtown heritage area and has purposely built amenities to attract its residents to the downtown core. The town of Aurora has diligently worked at preserving much of its heritage. I commend the mayor, the members of council, and the residents of Aurora, who have shared the unity of vision to make Aurora the worthy recipient of this award.

The Prince of Wales award was presented to the mayor of Aurora at the celebrations in Quebec City this fall. Congratulations on this achievement, and best wishes.

* * *

[Translation]

MICHEL A. THÉRIEN

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise here today to highlight the work of Michel A. Thérien, a poet from Ottawa, who has earned the admiration of critics as well as the recognition of several literary organizations.

Michel is an ardent supporter of francophone culture in Canada and around the world. He helped make poetry a focal point of the Biennale de la langue française. This year, he spent a month as artist in residence at the Maison des ailleurs in Charleville-Mézières, the birthplace of Arthur Rimbaud. He is the first Canadian ever to receive this honour.

Mr. Thérien's collection entitled *Du vertige et de l'espoir: Carnets africains* was short-listed for the 2008 Governor General's literary awards.

Statements by Members

Michel Thérien is an excellent example of the vitality of Franco-Ontarian culture and the abundant creativity of our artists. Bravo, Michel, and may your muses continue to inspire you.

* * *

● (1405)

[English]

UKRAINE

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the victims of the Ukrainian genocide of 1932-33, otherwise known as the Holodomor. Last May the House unanimously voted to establish the fourth Saturday of each November as the Ukrainian Famine and Genocide ("Holodomor") Memorial Day and to officially recognize the Ukrainian famine of 1932-33 as an act of genocide.

Last weekend the Minister of Immigration was in Kiev with representatives of the Ukrainian Canadian community to commemorate this act of genocide. On November 22, Canadians all across Canada joined Ukraine in remembering the 75th anniversary of this tragic event that took millions of Ukrainian lives.

Remembrance is a living memorial to the victims and to their loss of life, human rights and dignity, and a tribute to the fact that sometimes in some places truth prevails over darkness and denial.

* * *

[Translation]

TROIS-RIVIÈRES

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, festivities to celebrate the 375th anniversary of the founding of the city of Trois-Rivières will begin in January 2009.

Over a year ago, the city and its planning committee submitted a request for financial assistance from the federal government. Yet the committee responsible for planning the festivities has still not heard anything from the ministers in question. Time is running out and Trois-Rivières definitely does not want to have to pay the price for the apathy shown by the former heritage minister.

While the city has received \$2 million from the Quebec government to celebrate this important historic event properly, the federal government has yet to respond to the local stakeholders in this file.

Trois-Rivières, the second francophone city founded in the Americas, fully deserves a financial contribution by the federal government in planning its 375th anniversary.

* * *

[English]

VISIT OF THE AGA KHAN

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to thank God and my deceased parents with whose blessings I am here today. I would also like to thank my wife, Neetu, and my children, Jatin, Chetan, and Arisha, who support me in all I do. Finally I must acknowledge and thank the constituents of Calgary Northeast, who elected me to represent them in the House of Commons.

Statements by Members

My riding includes many members of Canada's Ismaili community, who were pleased to welcome their spiritual leader, the Aga Khan, to our city yesterday as part of his cross-Canada tour. This afternoon up to 14,000 Ismailis are expected to attend a gathering in Calgary, and nearly 50,000 Ismailis attended the gathering in Toronto last weekend.

His Highness the Aga Khan praised Canada for its commitment to pluralism and human rights, values that are shared by the Conservative government. That is why we teamed up with the Aga Khan to build the global centre for pluralism.

On behalf of the Conservative Party, I would like to welcome the Aga Khan to Canada and wish him the best of success for the remainder of his visit.

* * *

UKRAINE

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this weekend we memorialized the 75th anniversary of the Holodomor, the famine-genocide of Ukraine's rural population in 1932-33. Millions starved to death in the very breadbasket of Europe.

In 1932-33, Moscow put in place a master plan for the Ukrainians. Behind barbed wire, Ukraine became a hell on earth, her lush countryside denuded of leaves and grasses as people ate anything that grew. It became a land where no birds sang, where no grasses rustled, where the deathly silence in villages was broken only by wagons picking up the dead.

One by one, hundred after hundred, thousand after thousand, million after million laid their skin-and-bone bodies down onto Ukraine's fertile black soil and became one with their land, their lives extinguished.

Today, let us pledge to those millions of innocent victims from humanity's tragic and common past a pledge of two simple words: never again.

[Member spoke in Ukrainian]

* * *

[Translation]

OLYMPIC TORCH

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I wish to celebrate the Canadian spirit that will be manifested in a year's time when the Olympic torch crosses Canada, passing through such places as Victoria, Alert, Point Pelee and Cape Spear, not to mention the beautiful province of Quebec.

Thousands of Canadians will take part in the 45,000 kilometre relay and millions of others will come together in communities, from coast to coast, to celebrate the Canadian Olympic spirit.

Thanks to the federal government's support for the Olympic torch relay and such programs as Own the Podium, Canada will be proud, in 2010, to have the world witness British Columbia's moment of glory.

I am proud that the torch will soon be arriving in Charlesbourg, in Quebec's beautiful national capital region, and we can hardly wait to see it light up the opening of the Olympic Games in Canada.

* * *

●(1410)

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the people of the northwest of British Columbia in Skeena—Bulkley Valley who for years have been living through a recession of their own. With the downturn of the fishing industry and the forestry sector, for more than eight years we have seen unemployment rates of greater than 80% in some of our communities, yet this has become a story of innovation and courage. In fact, it holds lessons for the rest of our country and the world about innovating in mining and bringing forward investment in the container port of Prince Rupert and the cooperative abattoir in Telkwa, B.C. People have risen up and banded together; first nations and non-first nations have joined in a common interest which is rebuilding our economy.

These lessons can be brought to a greater scope on the national level. The government must be willing to collaborate and to innovate and build an economy for the future, not one of the past.

* * *

UKRAINE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this year marks the 75th anniversary of one of the most heinous crimes in modern history: the state sponsored famine genocide of 1932-33 perpetrated by the Soviet communist regime of Joseph Stalin against the Ukrainian people.

This deliberate famine was devised to destroy Ukrainian nationalists' aspirations for a free and independent Ukraine. It was a terrible genocide that killed millions of Ukrainians, and for decades the truth about this horrific crime was suppressed by Soviet authorities and her western allies.

November 22 marked the first national Holodomor Memorial Day in Canada. I am humbled that Bill C-459 received unanimous support during the last Parliament and established this annual day of remembrance in Canada for the Holodomor.

More important, the act recognizes the great famine of 1932-33 for what it really was: a genocide. Numerous ceremonies took place across Canada in honour of Holodomor survivors, and of course, to remember the millions and millions of victims. Let their memories be eternal.

[Member spoke in Ukrainian as follows:]

Vichna yim pamyat.

[Translation]

LAVAL UNIVERSITY'S ROUGE ET OR

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, with an exciting 44-21 victory over the University of Western Ontario Mustangs, Laval University's Rouge et Or captured the 2008 Vanier Cup, the symbol of supremacy in Canadian university football.

This is the fifth Vanier Cup in the short history of the team from Quebec City. This was a magnificent ending to a perfect season, another feat that few teams can boast about.

The Bloc Québécois would like to congratulate everyone who contributed to their success: players, coaches, owners and supporters were all part of the winning formula. Laval University has every reason to be proud of its football team and its success has brought honour to all Quebec.

* * *

[English]

HIGH TECH INDUSTRY

Mr. Glen Pearson (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 1951, 3M Innovation first began transforming Canadian technology in its London, Ontario operation. Since then the London branch has grown to become a major high tech and green employer in our city, with tremendous spinoff business for the entire southwestern Ontario region.

On Friday, 3M had to announce that it would be laying off 140 full time positions. This will undoubtedly have an enormous impact on the lives of Londoners and other residents of the southwestern Ontario region.

We in this place must commit to increasing investment in our precious high tech sector now more than ever. This is the key to our prosperity as a country and what will define Canada as a global leader. We simply cannot afford to be laggards when it comes to investing in green technology.

* * *

MEMBER FOR KINGSTON AND THE ISLANDS

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my distinct privilege on behalf of every hon. member in this House to take at least a minute today to recognize an important anniversary that took place on Friday, November 21. For it was on that day in 1988 that you, Mr. Speaker, were first elected to represent the people in the riding of Kingston and the Islands. Twenty years is a long time to serve, indeed.

A little research tells me that your first speech in this place was on December 16, 1988, and your first question to the government of the day was regarding procedure. A biographer might call this foreshadowing for the role you are most well known for today.

Along the road, I understand that you served in a number of positions, many of them involving procedure, roles such as parliamentary secretary to the House leader, chair of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, and deputy chair of the committee of the whole House.

Oral Questions

On January 29, 2001, you were elected the 34th Speaker of the House of Commons, only the third Speaker in our history to be chosen by a secret ballot cast by fellow members of the House of Commons.

In the spirit of cooperation that now rules in this place, and on behalf of the members of this House, I wish to offer you congratulations on your 20 years of service to the people of Kingston and the Islands and to the people of Canada.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

● (1415)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Leeds—Grenville.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, two months ago, the Prime Minister said that there would be no recession if the Conservatives were elected. He said that creating a deficit would be stupid. Those were his own words. Now that the election is over, he is saying exactly the opposite. Canada will be in a Conservative recession and we will have a Conservative deficit.

In light of this double deception, how can Canadians believe a single word that comes out of the Conservative Prime Minister's mouth?

[English]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would hate to think where we would be if we had actually elected a Liberal government, because we would have an increased tax on Canadians at a time when they can least afford it. The Liberals were going to raise the GST. They were also going to add a carbon tax.

We need to continue cutting taxes where possible, and we need to face the reality that we are in difficult economic times worldwide.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the question was about ethics, not economics, especially not the nonsense economics we just heard.

Canadians want to know the unvarnished truth about the economy, not sugar coating and deception. Only yesterday, Kevin Page, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, confirmed that of course the Prime Minister knew about the deficit during the election.

Why, in the Prime Minister's own words, did the idea of a deficit go all the way from stupid to essential in just a few short weeks?

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, those are pretty harsh words coming from someone on the Liberal side, which actually lost the last election because the Liberals ran an election on a carbon tax that would have cost Canadians billions of dollars.

The leadership of our Prime Minister will take us through what we all know will be some difficult times.

Oral Questions

We are looking forward to our finance minister giving us an update on Thursday as to where we are going.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, “stupid” and “essential” are the Prime Minister's own words.

The economy is in recession when it shrinks for two quarters in a row, so why does the Prime Minister insist on talking about a technical recession? Does he think a technical recession is less scary? Is he telling a laid-off worker to be happy because he is only technically unemployed? Does the Prime Minister think that misleading Canadians on the economy is a mere technicality?

Why will he not stop the sugar coating, cut the jargon and call a recession a recession?

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing the member to finish his question.

When we have been talking on this side of the House of what stimulates the economy, Alistair Darling, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, said today, “To prevent the recession deepening, we also need to take action to put money into the economy immediately.... the best and fairest approach is a measure which will help everyone.... A much needed injection of spending”—by reducing the value added tax—“will make goods and services cheaper and, by encouraging spending, will help stimulate growth”.

That is exactly what the Conservative government did a year ago.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first the Parliamentary Budget Officer blames the new Conservative deficit on “previous [Conservative] policy decisions as opposed to weakened economic conditions”. Now, Tom Flanagan, the Prime Minister's former chief of staff, says that they have squandered the surplus on purpose, to justify “ideologically driven, neo-conservative cuts”.

Why did the Conservatives kill the contingency reserve during the good times, gutting the fiscal capacity to help Canadians during these tough times? Was it incompetence, or was it ideology?

• (1420)

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is ironic that the hon. member would once again raise the contingency fund, the fictional contingency fund. That actually was never legislated in the House.

The Liberals, if they did not just pass on all of the costs to the provinces through reduced transfer payments, would build up a slush fund for their March madness, of which we are all too tired. That is why Canadians elected a Conservative government, for prudent and frugal budgeting.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was a real contingency fund and it was a real \$13 billion surplus that the Conservative government inherited from the Liberal government.

What did the Conservatives do with that surplus? They savagely attacked investments in literacy, women's equality, access to the courts, and arts and culture programs, just to name a few.

Now, after gutting Canada's fiscal security, the finance minister is about to introduce Canada's new Conservative deficit.

Canadians deserve to know what kind of ideologically driven, neo-conservative cuts should vulnerable Canadians brace themselves for next?

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have heard a number of accusations.

I would like to remind the House that we have heard about this fictional contingency fund. We have heard about the fictional Kelowna accord and the fictional child care plan.

What is not fictional is the fact that the Liberals denied that there was fiscal imbalance with the provinces. We fixed that. We fixed that because it needed to be fixed. We needed to inject money into the provinces so they could continue to offer the services to Canadians that they need.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Prime Minister acknowledged that we could expect a deficit in the next year. On the weekend, he and the Minister of Finance both admitted that we were on the verge of a recession. So, while all OECD countries are taking measures to stimulate the economy and help their citizens, the Minister of Finance is telling us to wait for the next budget.

Does the Prime Minister not realize that he must act now, and not in three months?

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I might remind the hon. member that I just referred to today's announcement by the United Kingdom of \$38 billion in tax cuts, a reduction of 1.5% in its value-added tax.

We took those pre-emptive moves in our fall economic update a year ago. That was \$37 billion back in Canadians' pockets so they could prepare themselves for this downturn in the economy.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Any money that came back went into the pockets of the oil companies.

According to Sherry Cooper, the lead economist at the Bank of Montreal, now is the time for the government to take action and introduce measures to stimulate the economy. The Bloc Québécois presented a recovery plan to help the manufacturing and forestry industries and to help the people. In all, twenty or so suggestions were made to stimulate the economy. All that is missing is some political will. What is the Prime Minister waiting for?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said on many occasions, we took pre-emptive moves that put money back into Canadians' pockets.

We also established a \$1 billion community development trust fund that was specifically set up for communities that were impacted by layoffs, many of them in Quebec and many in northern Ontario. That is money that communities have had to invest in their infrastructure.

We put in place a \$33 billion infrastructure fund that will be spread out across this country. That is stimulus.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Prime Minister said he was willing to listen to our suggestions for dealing with the crisis in the manufacturing industry. Given the lack of real measures in the throne speech, the Bloc gave him some suggestions this morning, including a refundable tax credit for research and development.

Will the Minister of Finance finally understand the urgency of the situation and act now, or will he just tell us that he is going to sit back and wait for the next budget?

• (1425)

[English]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome those suggestions from the Bloc this morning.

The minister and the Prime Minister have been asking for some constructive observations, some suggestions as Bloc members put forward this morning as to what they feel they need in their communities.

I would encourage all members in the House to approach the Prime Minister and the finance minister with some suggestions rather than just the heckling we are hearing from the other side.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a chart on page 30 of the minister's 2007 economic statement showed that the manufacturing industry had been in recession since 2005. The situation is not getting any better, and tax cuts for businesses that are not turning a profit are not the solution.

One year later, will the minister finally open his eyes and act immediately by putting in place measures to stimulate the economy, as the Bloc Québécois has suggested?

[English]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am looking forward to sitting down with my hon. colleague to discuss how we can implement his suggestions.

We have some challenges ahead of us but we need to recognize that the bulk of the tax cuts that we put in place went to individuals so they could make their own decisions about how to spend that money. Whether they want to start a new business or continue with

their lifestyle, those are the options Canadians should be given. I look forward to working with my hon. colleagues to help improve that.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on the weekend, the finance minister said that Canada was facing a "technical recession". We would like to know what the difference is, in the Prime Minister's mind, between a technical recession and a regular recession, and, in particular, whether that makes any difference to the hard-working families and middle-class Canadians who are trying to get by in the real economy.

What is the difference?

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me read a quote in answer to this question. This comes from the Manitoba NDP government's Speech from the Throne:

The global crisis presents a fundamental choice between stepping back from planned tax reductions or providing predictability to businesses and citizens. Our choice is to maintain predictability. Therefore, our government will carry through on past budget commitments...In July, 2009 the corporate tax rate will be reduced again.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Premier of Manitoba has also pointed out that it makes no sense to give an unconditional corporate tax cut to big, profitable companies when our tax rates are already lower than our largest trading partner. So let us get the full story.

We can debate these statistics as long as we like but what Canadians are experiencing in the real economy is hurting. Will the government, in the economic update, in addition to a stimulus package to create jobs, also do something to protect savings, mortgages and pensions? Will it get the job done now?

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will be waiting for some positive suggestions from that party. We have received some from the Bloc. We are looking forward to some of those positive suggestions. We are also looking forward to the fall economic update on Thursday.

We do have a budget coming down early in the next year and that will provide the details that this House needs.

[Translation]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, the NDP presented the basic outline of a plan to stimulate the economy. Perhaps the hon. member was not here—I do not know—but he can read it.

The Prime Minister admitted yesterday that he had led Canada to the brink of a recession, and the Minister of Finance has said that, technically, we are already in a recession. But people do not lose their jobs technically; they lose them for real. It is not technical; it is tragic.

Will the government take steps to improve the employment insurance system in order to help people when they need this assistance?

Oral Questions

● (1430)

[English]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is why we put the changes to the EI system in budget 2008. We knew there was some trouble on the horizon. We knew that the notional surplus was long gone before the Conservatives ever took power.

The next budget will address many of the questions that the hon. member is raising today.

* * *

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the economic situation worsens, there is the development of a plan to help the ailing auto industry in the United States. Here in this country, where the auto industry represents 70% more importance to our economy, all we have from the government is more rhetoric and inaction.

When will the Conservatives wake up and propose a plan to help our workers and their families or will the government simply be a spectator watching the U.S. Congress siphon those jobs across the border to the United States?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me welcome the hon. member to this House. It is good to have him here, as we worked together in a previous place as well.

Nothing could be further from the truth from what the hon. member was stating. In fact, this government has been working hard with the auto sector. I want to make it clear to this House and to Canadians that there are no blank cheques.

At the same time, we acted well before the U.S. Congress was even contemplating anything. We are the ones who set up the auto innovation fund. We are the ones who have been reducing taxes for businesses, not only the auto sector but the parts suppliers and the dealers, and in fact all the consumers of Canada. We have been acting and we are proud of our record.

Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the blank cheques are the ones workers are starring at when they have been laid off, for example in General Motors, three months ahead of time because the government has done nothing about the shutdown of the auto industry. They have suffered enough in this country.

In the United States detailed studies have been produced that show the impact on families. We heard from the minister that there is no plan by the Conservatives to conserve jobs.

We at least have the right to know whether the Conservative government has done an impact study. Has it looked into how families would be affected, how other businesses would be affected and how communities would be affected? Does it know the impact so that it can at least be prepared to act as it watches the Americans go through what they are going through?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, whether it comes to the business development fund or the EDC, all these instruments of government activity, we have been there for the

Canadian consumer as well as Canadian small and medium sized enterprises.

When it comes to the auto sector in particular, at least on this side of the House, we want to see a plan for the auto sector. We are not like Liberals who send money and blank cheques to wherever without a plan. We want a long term plan, exactly what his former boss, Dalton McGuinty, said as well.

* * *

[Translation]

SENIORS

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are refusing to grant a grace period to seniors who have to roll their RRSPs into RRIFs. The Conservatives are forcing our seniors to sell their assets at the worst possible time, when the markets have already collapsed.

Is this how the Prime Minister plans to uncover the “great buying opportunities” he mentioned during the election campaign?

[English]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in another pre-emptive move by the finance minister, we raised the age from 69 to 71 when seniors were actually required to roll their RRSPs into RRIFs.

Let me be very clear. On Friday, the finance minister wrote letters to all of the federally regulated institutions that handle RRSPs and RRIFs and told them that they had to allow seniors to roll penalty-free. We are looking forward to a reaction by November 28.

[Translation]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, allow me to give the member an introductory course in finances. When seniors roll their RRSPs into RRIFs, they have to pay taxes. To pay these taxes, seniors have to sell off their investments when the markets are at rock bottom. In their letter to the banks, the Conservatives did not make any suggestions about how this problem could be fixed. They would have gotten better results writing to Santa Claus.

Do the Conservatives not realize that by refusing to act, they are wiping out our seniors' savings?

● (1435)

[English]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not the case and it is unfortunate that she is invoking Santa Claus into this debate.

We have taken pre-emptive moves. We have allowed seniors—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Ted Menzies: If the hon. member could be quiet long enough to listen to my answer she may hear the fact that we have actually taken those steps that allow seniors to roll RRSPs into RRIFs.

Yes, there is tax payable but let us remember that this is a tax shelter for seniors.

[Translation]

SECURITIES INDUSTRY

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the vice-president of Quebec's *Chambre de la sécurité financière*, Luc Labelle, had some harsh words for the common securities commission proposed by the Minister of Finance. He said that such a commission would signal nothing less than the end of entrepreneurship in the financial services sector in Quebec.

How can the Minister of Finance promote a project that could, according to Mr. Labelle, end up benefiting big players in Toronto's financial district at the expense of regional and Quebec stakeholders?

[English]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I might remind members of the House that we are the only industrialized country that does not have a common securities regulator. It should be our shame because we are stopping investments from coming in from outside. They look at our country and we have 13 separate regulators. That is not the sort of investment environment we need to be showing to the outside world.

We talk about protecting seniors' investments. A disjointed system of securities regulators spread across this country does not protect investments.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary lied to the House, because it is not true that there are no other countries with securities commissions.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Pierre Paquette: He misled the House. Mr. Labelle—

The Speaker: Order. I misheard the hon. member for Joliette. I heard him say a certain word in the House, not another word. He knows that such things cannot be said here. I invite the hon. member to correct his mistake and ask a question.

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I will withdraw the word "lied". But he did mislead the House and the Canadian people. There are securities commissions in other countries, such as in some states of the United States.

Mr. Labelle added that the best way to deal with the disjointed system the minister laments is not the centralization of power, but rather the passport system, which has proven its worth and works a bit like drivers' licences, which are valid across Canada.

Is the minister aware that, if his project goes ahead, the federal government and Ontario will be the ones making decisions about regulation?

[English]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting how in retracting his statement, he was able to say it one more time.

I would remind the hon. member, however, that I did say industrialized countries. This is to strengthen our regulatory system and that is very important. We have said many times in the House that we will respect provincial jurisdiction. We cannot force it on

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provinces. We encourage them and we will welcome all willing participants into this common securities regulator.

* * *

[Translation]

ARTS AND CULTURE

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the International Exchange for the Performing Arts, CINARS, is calling for a replacement program to offset the effects of the recent cuts, otherwise its 2009-10 programming could be affected.

CINARS points out that \$4.5 million in government assistance to replace the PromArt and trade routes programs would be worth between \$20 million and \$40 million in foreign contracts.

Given these figures, does the government not realize that culture is very profitable when it gets a little help?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we understand that arts and culture are important to the future of our country. That is why the Speech from the Throne says, "Cultural creativity and innovation are vital not only to a lively Canadian cultural life, but also to Canada's economic future."

If my colleague wants to walk the talk, she should vote for the Speech from the Throne. She should know that it was the Conservative government that increased spending on arts and culture by 8%. We are the ones who are defending arts and culture, and they are the ones who voted against that.

● (1440)

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, here we have another minister who is misleading the House. We know full well that the additional money for the Department of Canadian Heritage went to the Vancouver Olympics. If the government does nothing for artists, the 2009-10 agreements will be affected and 10 years of hard work will go down the drain.

Does the government realize that planned tours will be cancelled and that many organizations could close their doors forever because of what this government has done?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I just said, we increased our spending on arts and culture by 8%. This is not an increase for the department, but for arts and culture programming. We will spend \$2.3 billion this year. We increased spending. The Bloc Québécois voted against that. It was not present for Quebec. It was against these spending increases. We are the ones who are defending arts and culture in our country, and we will continue to do so in the future.

*Oral Questions***INFRASTRUCTURE**

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities denounced the administrative delays that are suddenly plaguing the building Canada program.

Now that the financial crisis is likely to lead us into a recession, it makes sense to expedite investments in infrastructure projects, in order to create jobs that would compensate for layoffs.

Will the Conservatives continue to sit on the \$3 billion in the building Canada fund in order to cover up the new Conservative deficit?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say hello to our new colleague from LaSalle—Émard.

We were very proud to meet with Jean Perrault and representatives from the municipalities three times last week. We decided to do two things: we must make decisions as quickly as possible and we must give the green light to important projects, not only for the building Canada program, but for Canada's economy. We will work with the municipalities to find solutions that will lead to real results.

[English]

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week the Federation of Canadian Municipalities denounced the delays and red tape that plagued the building Canada program under the Conservatives.

Why on earth will the Conservative government not allow municipalities to access the \$3 billion infrastructure fund that is just sitting there, so our cities can create new jobs and help stimulate their local economies? Is the government hoping to use that already-allocated money to hide its new Conservative deficit?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no, that is not the case. We are committed to make quick decisions on important infrastructure projects in Quebec and around the country, so that we can take advantage of the federal funding that was provided in last year's budget.

We also want to expedite green-light approval to infrastructure projects in every region of the country. We had a very positive meeting with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. We are working well with the provinces. We are committed to working hard and getting the job done.

I say to the member for LaSalle—Émard that we would be very pleased to work with her and we would welcome any suggestions she might have on how we can achieve these results, working together.

* * *

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' poor decision making and bad management has cost the forestry sector thousands of jobs, leaving many people in northern Ontario without work and unable to support their families. Now the Prime Minister says we are in a technical recession

as if it is no big deal. Unemployed workers in my riding think it is a very big deal.

Where is the plan to help the suffering, technically, unemployed forestry workers?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we understand the pressures on hard-working Canadians, especially those facing transition in times of economic instability.

In the Speech from the Throne, we committed to continuing assisting their industries through new market opportunities and through investments in innovation. We understand that Canada's traditional industries, like forestry, sustain the economic well-being of many regions and communities, and that is why we will get this job done.

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government understands from a distance.

[Translation]

We are talking about people's livelihoods here.

Forestry workers in my riding and ridings in Northern Ontario lost their jobs because the Conservatives refused to take action.

What am I supposed to say to a laid off worker who asks what the Conservative government is doing to help him or her?

• (1445)

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is why we have acted to support the workers with the creation of the community development trust. Let me share with the House how the creation of this community development trust is helping workers and families in the forestry industry. Frank Everitt, President of the United Steelworkers Local 1-424, said:

This program has helped our members and other forest workers in the north make the early transition to retirement possible, and in the process created job opportunities for others—

We are getting the job done.

* * *

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure to rise for the first time in this House as the first Conservative member of Parliament in over 50 years from the great riding of Brant. I wish to thank all the voters who made this possible.

Constituents in the riding of Brant have seen media reports that their personal information, including travel history, may be disclosed to U.S. safety authorities when they travel abroad.

Would the Minister of Transport please share with this House the measures he is taking to address any impacts this policy may have on all Canadians?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know I speak for all members of the House by welcoming the new member for Brant. All of us are looking forward to working with him.

Our government is committed to respecting the safety, security and privacy of each and every Canadian. I can assure the House that the secure flight program does not apply to domestic Canadian flights, nor does it apply to Canadian airline flights which pass over Alaska.

We will work with the new administration in the United States to do our part to promote the highest level of aviation security we possibly can. The U.S. has indicated that the secure flight program will be exempt for countries with a comparable security system, and we will work with our counterparts in the new U.S. administration on that important issue.

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FINANCE

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the economy continues to spiral downward, more and more Canadians are turning to credit cards even to pay for day to day fundamentals. Millions of credit card holders are alarmed to learn that in a few days banks are going to slap on an automatic 5% increase on interest rates. This is on top of the already punishing interest rates of over 20%.

When will the government step in and protect hard-working Canadians from getting further gouged on credit cards during this time of economic crisis?

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, might I remind hon. members that we as a government do not regulate the fees charged in the financial sector on exchange rates. It is a competitive system. No one is forcing Canadians to use those cards. If the card charges are too high, I would suggest to Canadians that they may lodge that complaint with their financial institutions or actually stop using them.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadian consumers need action, not platitudes.

Even before this latest ripoff, the prime rate had plummeted, yet ordinary consumers are getting no breaks on their credit cards. We have had enough of consumers being gouged. That is the same government that failed on ATM fees. Does it not realize it is the government that regulates the banks, not the banks that regulate the government?

Will the minister finally step in and make it clear that consumers must be put first in these difficult times?

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the concerns are valid, the Competition Bureau will be looking at this. However, I remind the hon. member that it is not a federally regulated jurisdiction.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on the weekend, and even against the recommendations of the Standing Committee on International Trade, the Prime Minister went ahead and announced a free trade agreement with Colombia. By signing such an agreement, there is no doubt that he is in favour of protecting

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Canadian companies' investments rather than human rights. Colombia has one of the worst human rights records in the hemisphere.

How can the Prime Minister justify such an agreement with Colombia when we know that union activists and indigenous peoples are assassinated with total impunity?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was an honour for me to sign the document mentioned by my friend. I would like to encourage him to read it because it contains very precise and specific sections. In chapter 16 in particular, I believe sections 16.3 and 16.4 relate to human rights and the rights of workers. The wording is very clear and strong.

• (1450)

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thériault (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, by signing the free trade agreement with Colombia, the Prime Minister is ignoring human rights and is an accomplice to the corruption within the Colombian government.

Does the Prime Minister realize that he is sending a very poor message to the international community by ignoring the most basic human rights?

[English]

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate we have more or less just returned to session and people are busy. This is a very thick document that was signed, but the sections that are being referred to by the hon. members are very clear. There is a very clear protection on human rights. The enforceable standards to comply with the International Labour Organization on everything from child labour to health and safety and occupation issues are very clear provisions.

This is not just for the many companies that are investing in Colombia. There are other companies there that have not been subject to these rules. They are now subject to them, along with rules on the environment and corruption.

* * *

POVERTY

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the report card on poverty released last Friday, Campaign 2000 said one in nine children in Canada is growing up in poverty. That is 760,000 children. As Canada slides into recession those figures are only going to increase. This report means the Conservatives cannot say they did not see it coming.

However, there is no plan. There is no poverty reduction strategy to ensure that more Canadian families in need do not fall further behind. Why not?

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Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, back in budget 2006 “Advantage Canada”, we outlined the beginning of our plans to help eliminate poverty, particularly for children. That is why we introduced the universal child care benefit. By the way, the universal child care benefit removed 55,000 children from the low income classes.

There is also the child tax benefit and the child disability benefit. There are a number of ways in which we have already taken action to help remove children from poverty.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 16,000 children in my home province of Nova Scotia alone are living in poverty. The Conservatives are ignoring the problem of child and family poverty, just like they ignored the whole financial crisis. It is bad management and the most vulnerable Canadians are the victims.

Why do the Conservatives not have a poverty reduction strategy to ensure that Canadian families in need are not left behind by this ideologically-driven and neo-conservative government that Tom Flanagan is so proud of?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we very much want to ensure that Canadians are living as well as possible, which is why, apart from the universal child care, we lowered the GST, which disproportionately helps the lower income people.

We also introduced the working income tax benefit to help lower income people get over that welfare wall and provide them with incentives to get back to work.

We also increased the guaranteed income supplement for our seniors. We significantly expanded the amount of money they could earn before having the claw back.

We are working hard to ensure people can be as well off as possible.

* * *

[Translation]

ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, too many people were not able to vote in the last election because they encountered various problems. These are problems we cannot forget now that we have been elected. In my riding, not everyone was able to vote. Some people do not have driver's licences. There are no roads. Some homes do not have addresses, and therefore are not on the voters list. The system is letting people down. What is the government doing to fix these problems and to enable people in remote regions to vote?

[English]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has taken many measures to ensure that all Canadians can vote. The identification measures are designed to ensure that all eligible Canadians can vote while strengthening the integrity of the electoral process, preventing fraud and ensuring that the voting process continues to command the confidence of Canadians.

We have conducted many measures to ensure that this is under way. I look forward to working with any member of the House of Commons or any citizen to ensure that everyone exercises his or her franchise.

• (1455)

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my fellow MPs told me not to expect an adequate answer but I expected at least an attempt.

Canada's north has the youngest population in Canada. Young people often do not have ID when they turn 18. Under the current rules, aboriginal people, young people and our seniors were turned away at the polls at some of the highest rates. It is a myth that we do not want to vote. We are simply being barred for not having the right kind of ID.

Could the minister explain what steps he will take to fix this problem?

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to welcome the member to the House of Commons. I can see that she may need to get used to some of the to and fro in this chamber.

The fact is that the government has taken many measures to ensure the integrity of the voting system. There are numerous ways in which people can ensure they get on the voters' lists. People who are on the voters' list can vouch for other people who may not be. These are good reforms. I hope the NDP will work with us.

* * *

PRODUCT SAFETY

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every day across Canada we are seeing signs that winter is quickly approaching and with winter comes the holiday season. When parents watch their children open presents on Christmas day they need to know that the gifts from Santa are safe.

Could the Minister of Health please tell the House what action the government is taking to ensure product safety?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the last election, Canadians made it clear that product safety was a priority. The Prime Minister listened, and I am happy and proud to say that the government will uphold the promise on the food and consumer safety action plan.

Health Canada has also improved its complaint procedures to ensure fast and effective action is taken when it learns of a serious issue.

JUSTICE

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week the government said that it was premature to seek Omar Khadr's return from Guantanamo Bay and that it supported Mr. Khadr's legal process.

Why is the government acquiescing in a prosecution that both the U.S. and Canadian Supreme Courts have deplored, that the U.S. president is committed to ending, that the Canadian Bar Association, in concert with others, has condemned, and where all other western nations have repatriated and protected their nationals?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we know, Mr. Khadr faces very serious charges. The Government of Canada has sought and received assurances that Mr. Khadr is being treated humanely. Departmental officials, as a matter of fact, have carried out several welfare visits with Mr. Khadr and will continue to do so.

However, any questions regarding whether Canada plans to ask for the release of Mr. Khadr from Guantanamo are premature and speculative in nature as the legal process and appeals are ongoing.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the fact remains that Omar Khadr is the only citizen of a western country who is still at Guantanamo.

The president-elect of the United States himself, Barack Obama, has confirmed that he plans to close this detention centre. The Conservatives persist in refusing to repatriate young Omar Khadr.

Does the Minister of Foreign Affairs plan on taking the first step to re-establish Canada's international reputation by calling for the immediate repatriation of Omar Khadr? This is something the new minister must do, absolutely.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said—and I will say it again—Mr. Khadr faces very serious charges. It should be noted that I did not say “Coderre”, I said “Khadr”. There should be no misunderstanding there.

Any questions regarding whether Canada plans to ask for the release of Mr. Khadr from Guantanamo are premature and speculative in nature as the legal process and appeals are ongoing.

• (1500)

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the incoming U.S. administration has been very clear about its intentions to get rid of the prison at Guantanamo. The president-elect has called it a “sad chapter in U.S. history”.

One citizen of one western country, only one, is still locked up there, a Canadian, Omar Khadr.

Would the Prime Minister rather Omar Khadr be extradited to the U.S. to be locked up in Leavenworth maximum security? Why would the Prime Minister not rather bring the tortured, young, broken boy back home to face the Canadian justice system?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the individual is charged with very serious accusations.

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The hon. colleague refers to other countries. We need to indicate in this case that the individual has been charged, he is in a process and there is a judicial system that is ongoing. The Government of Canada does not want to interfere in the judicial sovereignty of another nation.

* * *

ARCTIC SOVEREIGNTY

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has been defined for decades as the “true north strong and free”.

Our government has made some significant strides to protect and preserve Canadian interests in the Arctic.

Could the hon. Minister of Transport please inform this chamber of the efforts we have taken and will take to preserve our Arctic sovereignty?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was asked just 20 minutes ago “Where was all the anger? Where was all the indignation?” as Minister of Transport.

I want to tell the House that we will be putting all our anger against foreign shippers who pollute our Arctic waters. The Prime Minister announced this past August that we will extend our jurisdiction of enforcing Canada's top environmental enforcement laws to a full 200 nautical miles off our coast.

We will get tough with Arctic polluters and we will ensure that our Arctic waters are kept clean.

* * *

JUSTICE

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the responses of the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Is the government not concerned, as its own officials in foreign affairs appear to be, with the message being sent to the international community that however unjustly a Canadian citizen is being treated abroad, however illegal the process and however much it violates the rule of law, Canada will acquiesce so long as Mr. Khadr is still awaiting trial, however indefinitely, even though American officials have even said that they may hold him even if he is acquitted?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would remind you, as well as my hon. colleagues, that my colleague was in government when Mr. Khadr was sent to Guantanamo. He must fully understand that there is a judicial system and a process in place which the government intends to respect to its fullest extent.

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS****SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (B), 2008-09***[English]*

A message from Her Excellency the Governor General transmitting supplementary estimates (B) for the financial year ending March 31, 2009, was presented by the President of the Treasury Board and read by the Speaker to the House.

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a copy of the supplementary estimates (B) and a copy of the vote allocation by the standing committee for the House.

● (1505)

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Given the short duration of this sitting of the House before the usual adjournment in December and the conclusion of the current supply period and given the fact that the standing committees of the House are not yet up and running to be able to receive the estimates and examine them in the ordinary course, I wonder if the government House leader could indicate whether he will make every effort, in collaboration with all other parties in the House, to establish the standing committees as rapidly as possible, not taking the full ten days allowed under the Standing Orders, so the committees may be seized of these estimates at the earliest possible time and have at least a chance to have a meeting or two before the end of the supply period in December.

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, in response to that point of order, the government is very willing to try to negotiate with the other parties to have our membership lists in for all standing committees as quickly as possible, in particular for those that would be seized with the economic situation facing our country today.

* * *

*[Translation]***ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND PRIVACY**

The Speaker: I have the honour to table the 2007-08 annual report of the Auditor General of Canada on the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act.

[English]

This document is deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights as soon as it is struck.

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INCOME TAX ACT

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-227, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (travel and accommodation deduction for tradespersons).

She said: Mr. Speaker, it is my great privilege today to re-introduce as my very first bill this Parliament a bill for which the Canadian building and construction trades have been lobbying for over 30 years. The bill would, at long last, allow tradespersons and indentured apprentices to deduct travel and accommodation expenses from their taxable income so they could secure and

maintain employment at a construction site that would be more than 80 kilometres from their home.

It has never made sense for tradespersons to be out of work in one area of the country while another region suffers from temporary skilled labour shortages simply because the cost of travelling is too high. In these difficult economic times, it is especially incumbent upon us as legislators to do everything we can to help Canadians secure work.

I have spoken to the Minister of Finance about this bill and he has assured me that it would be considered as part of the budgetary process. I hope it will be reflected in the economic update that the minister is delivering on Thursday. For the government, the revenues generated through EI savings and additional income tax collected will far outweigh the cost of this tax benefit.

The bill would be a win-win-win. It would be a win for the government's coffers, a win for the Canadian economy and a win for workers in the building trades. I am hopeful that in seeking ways to address the current economic crisis, all members of the House will put partisanship aside and work with me to ensure that the bill receives the speedy passage it deserves.

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

* * *

● (1510)

PETITIONS

DARFUR

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to present some petitions that have been organized by Canadians for Action in Darfur.

The petitioners call upon the government to engage with the international community in whatever way is necessary to stop the humanitarian catastrophe in Darfur.

INTERNET CHILD LURING

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition today on behalf of the St. Mary of the Angels Parish Council of the Catholic Women's League of Canada and numerous other residents of my riding of Tobique—Mactaquac.

The petitioners draw the attention of the House to the serious concerns with respect to the safety of children from being sexually exploited over the Internet.

They call upon the Minister of Public Safety and Parliament as a whole to take whatever means necessary to halt all future occurrences of this exploitation.

[Translation]

INTERPROVINCIAL BRIDGE

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to once again present a petition on behalf of the citizens of the riding of Ottawa—Vanier and the area regarding the need to build a bridge, perhaps even two, in order to create a ring road around the national capital region and to get heavy trucks out of the downtown core for a number of reasons.

The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to force the National Capital Commission to conduct an in-depth study regarding a possible bridge linking the Canotek industrial park and the Gatineau Airport, namely, option number 7 of the first phase of the environmental assessment of the interprovincial crossings.

This wish is expressed with the sincere hope of effectively managing heavy truck traffic in the national capital region.

[English]

CONSUMER PRICE INDEX

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my first petition is from a number of Canadians who ask the Parliament of Canada to take responsibility for the error made in 2001 by Statistics Canada in the calculation of the Consumer Price Index. Because of this error, recipients of the Canada pension plan, old age security and guarantee income supplement have been under-compensated by a compounded half percentage point a year and have lost benefits totalling over \$1 billion.

The petitioners wish the government to take the necessary steps to rectify this error and help our seniors.

PUBLIC SERVICE HEALTH CARE PLAN

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my second petition is from members of the Public Service Alliance of Canada who wish to draw to the attention of the House of Commons the fact that federal public sector workers, retirees and their families do not have access to a health drug card under the Public Service Health Care Plan.

The petitioners ask that Parliament direct the Treasury Board of Canada to provide PSHCP members with a health drug card by December 31, 2008.

DARFUR

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my final petition is from a number of Canadians who are profoundly concerned about the 400,000 people who have lost their lives and the 2.5 million who have been displaced in the humanitarian catastrophe in Darfur.

These Canadians call upon the Government of Canada to play a leading role in ending the despair, rape and killing by engaging with the international community for the purpose of pursuing whatever action is necessary to end these atrocities.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, petitions continue to come to my office from citizens all across this country drawing attention to the House of Commons the fact that the trafficking of women and children across international borders for

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the purpose of sexual exploitation be condemned. They draw to the attention of parliamentarians that it is the duty of Parliament to protect the most vulnerable members of society from harm, those being the victims of human trafficking. They ask parliamentarians to continue their work to combat the trafficking of persons worldwide.

These petitions continue to come in droves day after day.

● (1515)

DARFUR

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions. The first one is from a number of people from Quebec who are concerned about the crisis in Darfur.

[Translation]

They point out that 400,000 people have been killed and 2.5 million have been displaced since 2003. The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to take action, with the international community, to put an end to these atrocities.

[English]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my second petition is from many Yukoners who have noted that for 50 years the Chinese government has oppressed the people of Tibet. The government promised to improve human rights if it were given the right to host the Olympics, but the brutality continues. Since 1950, 1.2 million Tibetans have been killed by the Chinese government.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to negotiate honestly and sincerely with the Dalai Lama. They also ask that the Prime Minister openly and fearlessly confront China's tyrannical opposition to human and civil rights, freedom and dignity of the Tibetan people.

JUSTICE

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in the House and present a petition from constituents from the Fraser Valley.

The petitioners say that property crime is a serious offence that affects most people and often results in huge financial losses and that a majority of property offences are committed by a minority of prolific offenders.

They ask that the government provide security and reasonable legislation to protect citizens.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

*The Address***SPEECH FROM THE THRONE***[English]***RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY**

The House resumed consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session, of the amendment and of the amendment to the amendment.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand here before you and my fellow members to participate in the debate on our government's Speech from the Throne.

First, allow me to congratulate you on your re-election as Speaker, a well deserved recognition of your skills and talent.

Second, allow me to express my appreciation and gratitude to the fine folks of Edmonton Centre for giving me the opportunity to continue to represent them in this place. It is a responsibility and a privilege that I take very seriously.

I would also like to thank my wife of 40 years, Judy, and our children, Jennifer and Robb, for their love and support.

As we are all aware, the Speech from the Throne is a blueprint for our government's action to protect Canada's future. It contains a five-pronged plan to ensure that our economy remains resilient during and after this period of global economic uncertainty, but we should not forget that the Speech from the Throne also outlines how our government will help to ensure the safety of our families and the security of our country.

Safety and security are concepts that are broad in scope but speak most to the justice system, national security, and product and food safety in our great country. Addressing these areas is in the favour of all Canadians, not just a privileged few. By continuing to seek reform in these areas, we put the interests of all Canadians first.

During the last election, our government promised to act on a number of priorities to ensure a Canada that is strong and free. These priorities included defending Canada's sovereignty, rebuilding the Canadian Forces, improving food and product safety and environmental laws, and strengthening our justice system. With these actions, our government is striving to ensure a safe and secure Canada for all Canadian families.

Food, product and environmental safety, an effective justice system, and Canadian self-reliance and sovereignty are matters that most directly affect the health and well-being of all Canadians. In addition to safeguarding our economy, these matters should be top of mind for those who represent Canadians in this place.

Canada is a nation where children should be able to play safely in their own yards, where serious gun criminals should serve time in prison for their actions, where the food on the dinner table is safe to eat, and where we can assume our children will grow up to enjoy the Canada we know today, not a Canada without jurisdiction over its own Arctic lands or a Canada with weakened armed forces, unable to come to our aid in a time of real need.

In the 2007-08 United Nations human development index, Canada was ranked as the fourth most livable place in the world out of 192 countries. This is an indication that many countries in the world look up to Canada and strive to be like us. We must work together to protect the future of this truly great country, a country we all know and love.

When Canadians commute to work, eat dinner or tuck their kids in at night, they are not thinking about the government. When they elect a new government, Canadians rightly expect that government to be responsible and act in their best interests. We do this by ensuring the safety and security of our fellow Canadians, through actions such as being the first country in the world to take action on bisphenol A, by proposing to strengthen the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, and by cracking down on toxic chemicals with our chemicals management plan.

Improvements to the chemicals management plan will improve the degree of protection against hazardous chemicals. It includes a number of new proactive measures to make sure that chemical substances are managed properly and are not found in the toys of our children, the water we drink, or the baby bottles we feed our infants with on a daily basis.

[Translation]

Our government will bring in legislation providing better oversight of food, drug and consumer products. It will strengthen the power to recall products and increase penalties for violators. It will also move quickly to launch an independent investigation of this summer's listeria outbreak and act quickly upon its findings

Protecting and promoting Canadians' health and safety is a top priority for the Government of Canada. Canadians need to know that the food on their dinner table, the toys they buy their children and the medicines they rely on are safe.

Budget 2008 allocated over \$458 million over five years to the food and consumer safety action plan to support collaboration, strengthen safety programs, and replaced outdated laws with new ones.

In general, Canadians are well served by food and product safety measures, but we are facing new challenges as global commercial practices evolve.

● (1525)

Recent incidents involving hazardous food, health and consumer products have shown that we need to update our regulatory processes and the underlying legislation.

*The Address**[English]*

By taking action now, we will significantly reduce future costs associated with water treatment, clean-up of contaminated sites, and treating illness related to chemical exposure. We will improve our fellow Canadians' quality of life and better protect our environment.

This plan will build on Canada's position as a global leader in the safe management of chemical substances and products. It will marshal new and better science to improve the assessment and mitigation of risks, and it will provide Canadian families with better information about the safe use and disposal of a range of everyday products.

On April 8 of this year the Prime Minister announced that the government will boost protection for Canadian consumers with a tough and comprehensive overhaul of food and safety laws. The food and consumer safety action plan is a comprehensive set of new measures aimed at establishing tougher regulation of food, health and consumer products, and includes initiatives to update and redefine Canadian food content labels to better reflect the true origins of products in today's global marketplace.

In today's world, products make their way to our grocery store shelves from every corner of the earth. As a result, under the current guidelines, food marked, "Product of Canada" or "Made in Canada" actually may not be very Canadian at all. We have tightened the definitions of these familiar labels so Canadians know exactly what they are getting, and getting exactly what they want. That way, when food contaminations happen in other areas of the world, we are able to quickly identify the products that contain contaminated ingredients and isolate them.

Another example of the government placing Canadians' health and safety first is found in the many measures we have taken to ensure Canadians are protected from crime in their daily lives. In times of uncertainty, as in any other time, Canadians need to be assured that they are safe in their homes and communities. The government has and will continue to take tough action against crime and work with our law enforcement and judicial partners to ensure our law-abiding citizens are protected. Serious offences will be met with serious penalties.

We will work to strengthen the legal provisions that currently deal with youth crime, gang crime and organized crime. Additionally, we will act to end the cross-border gun smuggling and punish those who commit gun crimes, not the law-abiding long gun and general firearm owners.

The government's action on tackling crime has already responded to the collective desire of Canadians to put victims first and take a practical approach to law and order, one that is firm but fair.

We have introduced new ways to detect and investigate drug-impaired driving and are strengthening penalties for impaired driving.

We will introduce legislation to significantly strengthen the criminal law response to violence against pregnant women. Our new legislation would expand the list of aggravating factors to be considered by a sentencing judge to include the fact of a woman's

pregnancy. It is important to note, however, that this bill will not open the door to fetal rights.

This legislative proposal is the next step in the government's commitment to make our streets and communities safer, particularly for women during pregnancy. The safety and security of Canadians is our utmost priority. As such, we will continue moving forward on our tackling crime agenda. Last year, after two long years of delay from the opposition parties in both this House and the other place, the government was able to see our tackling violent crime legislation become law.

This legislation brings to an end soft lenient penalties and assures dangerous criminals who threaten our communities will now get the jail time and penalties they so richly deserve.

[Translation]

We will protect young Canadians from sexual predators by raising the age of consent from 14 to 16.

We have also introduced new parole conditions that require individuals charged with a serious gun crime to justify their release pending trial.

Our first priority is the safety and security of Canadians. That is why we are tackling crime. Across Canada, trials are getting longer and longer, and court proceedings are being started later and later. In general, people believe that reform is needed. The government will work with its partners to ensure that justice is served swiftly and fairly.

This government will continue to take concrete action in areas that are important to Canadians because protecting society is a priority for us, not an afterthought. We are proud of the work we have done over the past two years to introduce these changes, and we will continue to tackle crime.

Now, families and communities across Canada can feel safer.

[English]

On a broader level, the government has also striven to protect Canada and its citizens as a whole. The Canada-first defence strategy is our government's comprehensive long-term plan to ensure the Canadian Forces have the people, equipment and support they need to protect our interests, to fulfill Canada's international commitments, and to keep our true north strong and free.

The Address

As the name implies, the first priority of our Canada-first defence strategy is to strengthen our ability to defend our country and to protect our people. It would improve surveillance of our land and coastal borders, and bolster our capacity to provide support for civilian authorities in the event of natural disasters or major international events.

We are also establishing a year-round arctic training station at Resolute Bay that would be an army facility, a deep-sea docking and refuelling facility, and a port in Nanisivik. We will be requiring replacements for various aircraft and also enhanced unmanned aerial vehicle surveillance of the north. By protecting our arctic sovereignty, we are protecting Canada's sovereignty.

Our government will continue to take our responsibilities on the world stage very seriously. Our men and women in uniform, and those who work alongside them, have given us all much to be proud of as they take a leading role in bringing stability in the future to Afghanistan. It is never easy and there is always sacrifice.

That is what Canada has stood for, for more than a century: being prepared to do the right thing, for the right reasons, on behalf of those who cannot do it for themselves.

My three trips to Afghanistan and my continuous contact with the Canadian Forces have given me a deep sense of appreciation and gratitude for the Canadian soldier, sailor, airman and airwoman. We ask so much of them and they always respond.

We have an obligation to ensure that our military has all the necessary equipment and training at their disposal and that we look after them and their families when the mission is completed. We made incredible progress in that area in the last two and a half years, and we intend to keep at it.

Beyond strengthening our security at home and abroad, the Canada-first defence strategy would deliver significant economic benefits for Canadians. This unprecedented commitment of stable, long-term funding would provide good jobs and new opportunities for the thousands of Canadians who work in defence industries and benefit the dozens of communities across the country that provide support for military bases.

Canada's aerospace and defence industries in all parts of the country can compete with anyone and they will continue to earn their business the old-fashioned way: by being the best.

The real measure of success in politics is not the number of times our name is in the headlines or the number of speeches we make in this chamber; it is in whether we are delivering the real, tangible results for Canadians on issues that matter to them.

On keeping families safe, the related legislation may not make the pundits' hearts flutter, but knowing our efforts are protecting children, seniors and other vulnerable Canadians from becoming victims of crime is one of the most important results any of us could strive for.

On healthy families, it may not make the nightly news that parents have more peace of mind that their children's toys are safe. But guess what? The parents themselves certainly do care.

Families do not want to spend their time focusing on the government. Nor should they. They are right to expect that their government will spend its time focusing on them. They are right to expect a government that will work together to keep Canada safe and secure.

There are unquestionably some tough times ahead for Canada and all other countries around the world. What is required is sure and steady leadership. Our government has shown that leadership at home and our Prime Minister has shown that leadership abroad, on the foreign stage at recent meetings of the G-20 and APEC.

As only 2% of the world economy, we cannot go it alone and we cannot avoid the impact of the current global economic crisis. What we can avoid is panic and overheated rhetoric, which serves no one.

I look forward to working with all hon. members in this House to protect Canada's future for Canadians at home and to preserve Canada's place in the community of nations.

• (1530)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know the government is interested in reducing crime, but what exactly does the government plan in relation to the things that have actually proven successful, that is, preventative measures, removing the root causes, new forms of training and rehabilitation, and alternative sentencing. We can talk to experts like the Chief of Police in Ottawa and the various witnesses who came to committee last time before some misguided legislation. They explained the success rate, for instance, of the aboriginal justice strategy, which I know the minister is supportive of, and I thank him for that. However, we need permanent funding for that, not just three years of funding. It has reduced recidivism and made Canada much safer in the areas it has been used, where it has been pioneered. What is the government doing to follow up on those proven methods of reducing crime?

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, there were many issues in the question by my colleague, the hon. member for Yukon.

The simple fact is there is no one button we can push to end crime or to get a grip on crime. We have to attack it from all aspects, from the root causes, as the member mentioned, all the way to the other end. When the system fails, the parents fail or the person fails and a serious crime is committed, there are serious consequences for serious acts. We can no longer have people involved in the revolving door of justice. We have to attack both ends of it. We have to work with communities. Personally, I think it goes back to families. We have to somehow instill in families a better ethic for taking care of each other. Quite frankly, I think we used to do a much better job of that.

We have to look carefully at examples, as the member said, of things that do work, not just in Canada, but in other jurisdictions as well. We have to work across party lines, which we do pretty well with most committees in this place, to consider good ideas wherever they come from.

The Address

It is not as simple as we are going to do A, B and C. It will be an evolving process. We have to keep an open mind. Ultimately, at top of mind has to be what is best for Canadian citizens.

• (1535)

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member talked about the leadership of the Prime Minister. One question I want to pose is on the whole issue of the deficit.

We just went through an election campaign, from September 2 to October 14. That question was asked of the Prime Minister almost each and every day and each and every day he said that there would be no deficit, that it would be irresponsible for the government to go into deficit and that the suggestion was ridiculous.

Now we are hearing that the suggestion is not ridiculous, that a deficit is essential. The Parliamentary Budget Officer said that it was not caused by world economic events, but by policies of the Conservative government. Obviously the Prime Minister knew.

Considering that the Prime Minister knew exactly the financial situation of the government, knew exactly we were going into deficit, why did he not tell the Canadian people?

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the short speech.

The fact is that the situation is changing rapidly. It is deteriorating rapidly. Anybody who has studied it knows that. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has an opinion and he is entitled to it.

The simple fact is the Prime Minister took action a year ago, the kind of action the United Kingdom government is taking today. We are ahead of the United Kingdom by about a year.

As I said in my remarks, as 2% of the world's economy, there is no way we can avoid what is going on in the rest of the world. The other 98% will take us along with it, whether we like it or not.

What we can do is take measures that will alleviate to the extent possible, and it may not be very much, the impact on Canadians. We need a government, a Prime Minister, who is not afraid to make tough decisions, who is not afraid to lead. That is something we had been missing for many years until January 23, 2006. We have it now. We will be better for it and all Canadians will be proud of us and will thank us.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that previous answer was utter nonsense. The Department of Finance tracks the government revenues daily and weekly. If the Prime Minister did not know that we were in a recession during the election campaign, he is grossly incompetent. Either the Prime Minister was economical with the truth during the election campaign, or he is grossly incompetent. Those are the two choices he has.

The irony is that the Conservatives are soliciting ideas from members on this side as to how to get out of this mess, after having spent literally millions of dollars trashing the Leader of the Opposition, ridiculing him, destroying him in public. They ridiculed whatever ideas he put forward, and then a few weeks later they adopted them as their own.

I wonder whether the hon. member thinks that before the Conservatives ask for help from the opposition, possibly an apology might be in order.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for the incredibly non-partisan question. It is incredible. We talked about less partisanship in this place. We talked about working together to face the challenge that Canada has which is not of Canada's making at all. We are 2% of the world's economy. The other 98% is going to drag us down. The government has taken leadership. The Prime Minister has taken leadership. Canadians obviously recognize that with the results of the last election.

It would be nice if we could come to this place and work through a problem that is facing all Canadians. Whether they are Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, NDP or independent, it does not matter; we need to work together with each other in a non-partisan way. It would be really refreshing if that hon. member and some of his colleagues would take that to heart.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, as the member suggested, I am going to make the effort to be non-partisan while working on a problem.

I would not expect him to be familiar with this issue because it is a local issue, but the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Indian Affairs are working with the Teslin Tlingit Council on an innovative justice strategy. The government should be proud of this process because it is going to create something very new that is definitely going to reduce crime. I compliment the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Indian Affairs for working on it.

I would like assurance from the member that he will help to make sure this continues to move along as quickly as possible. It has been worked on for a number of years now and it is getting near the finalization date.

I would like the member, as he said, to work in a cooperative and non-partisan way with the ministers and staff of those departments who need to be in a few final meetings to conclude this excellent new system. It could be a pilot project for the rest of the country.

• (1540)

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Yukon for that information. I am not particularly familiar with that specific program. I am very supportive of anything that will make life better for aboriginal members of Canada's society.

Edmonton Centre has a very large aboriginal population and they have some tremendous disadvantages of which we are all well aware. We are all trying our best to work on resolving these issues. We can have different ideas about the road we are on, but we are all focused on the same destination.

I am quite happy to promise my personal support for anything that works, for anything that will make life better for that segment of Canadians, because that will ultimately make life better for all of us.

The Address

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, for months the Liberal Party had been warning the Government of Canada that it was running perilously close to a deficit. Its spending was out of control at an unsustainable rate and it had reduced its revenues and was running itself toward a deficit. These are simple facts and our warnings were ignored. In fact, our warnings were ridiculed.

When the Leader of the Opposition put forward several ideas as to how the government could right its ship of state, he too was ridiculed and literally millions of dollars were spent on destroying the man's reputation.

Now apparently the Conservatives want some help. First, our warnings have been ignored. Second, we have been ridiculed. Third, we have been asked for help. Fourth, the Prime Minister was economical with the truth during the election.

Can the member give me any kind of coherent reason as to why the Liberal Party of Canada should help bail out the Conservative Party because—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary has just 30 seconds left.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, it would take much longer than 30 seconds to answer.

We certainly are not looking for a bailout from that party, the party that did a lot in terms of spending. In talking about out of control spending, during the last two years of that party's government, spending was out of control. We have been spending money on the things the Liberals neglected for years. For 13 long years they neglected many programs. When we became government and looked at the files, there was nothing in them because nothing had been done.

It is a matter of picking up the ball and taking care of the neglect of the Liberal government. That is also not being economical with the truth. It is a fact.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Québec.

There are a number of things that can be said about the throne speech. However, the most important thing is that this throne speech is extremely disappointing, in the opinion of the Bloc Québécois. It is disappointing because it does not acknowledge Quebecers' interests and core values.

In my opinion, the Prime Minister has remained completely insensitive to how the crisis is affecting the people of Quebec and the economy. Paradoxically, during the election campaign, the Prime Minister downplayed the crisis and its impact on the economy in general. Now that the election is over, we realize that the crisis, which is extremely serious, is having a negative effect on the whole economy of Canada and Quebec. The throne speech is therefore very disappointing in that respect.

In addition, the Prime Minister does not seem to have learned anything from the election results in Quebec. On voting day, 78% of Quebecers said that they disagreed with the Conservative government's methods and economic policies. Moreover, these are not true economic policies, because all the government has ever

done—and the only answer it ever gives us—is to introduce business tax cuts, which are its way of stimulating the economy.

Now we are in a difficult situation, yet the throne speech does not deviate one bit from what has been said in the past two and a half years. It is also very disappointing in that respect.

Before the throne speech, I had high expectations, but I also felt very positive about the announcements made by the Prime Minister, the Conservative Party and the government that the throne speech would focus on the economy. However, the throne speech is nothing but a series of broad statements, with no real substance. We had hoped for measures that would help and support the manufacturing and forestry industries, especially in Quebec, but that is not what we got.

We were told there would be some degree of openness, but did not see any. It is therefore very difficult to vote for a throne speech that does not meet the expectations that were told we could hope for. Furthermore, we also noted that this Speech from the Throne really reflects the last Conservative convention; in other words, it is very ideological. Yet we know that Quebecers do not espouse this ideology and the Bloc Québécois therefore cannot go along with it. On the contrary, I think Quebecers made it very clear to us through their votes that they are completely against it.

We are definitely disappointed and we do not believe that the Prime Minister has risen to the challenge. Naturally, we hoped that this throne speech would not have the usual irritants. On the contrary, the Speech from the Throne remains vague about any desire to truly support Quebec's economy or that of Canada in general. What measures did it contain, rather than just sweeping principles? There are no real targets. It says nothing about how the government will intervene or at what level. It is therefore extremely disappointing. It leaves too much to the imagination to allow us to support it and believe that this government really will support the economy.

As we all know, the forestry and manufacturing sectors are facing disastrous situations, especially the forestry sector in Quebec. There is no end to the number of jobs being lost, and the temporary stoppages in pulp and paper mills and in sawmills. We all know that a very large part of Quebec's economy is based entirely on the logging industry.

• (1545)

There was nothing about this. All summer I visited my riding, which is very large. I was in Shawinigan and in the Chénouan region—Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pérade, Saint-Tite, La Tuque and Parent. All of these municipalities depend on the forestry industry. Everyone, the entire population, is saying the same thing, no matter where they live: why is the federal government not doing anything to help us? The people are saying that the government has done nothing to help them so far and that it is standing idly by.

The Address

People need help. They need a government that helps them. That is what they are expecting, but absolutely nothing has been done. The results can hardly be surprising. The people know that the Conservative government has never had a plan to truly help struggling industries, particularly in Quebec. By increasing the number of irritants, the Prime Minister has decidedly demonstrated that he does not seem to understand what is happening in Quebec.

Arts cuts were announced last August and they were discussed at length during the election campaign. Many people feel that these cuts are very significant for Quebec. We saw this from the outcome of the election and we saw it during the election campaign: people were not willing to accept such cuts.

The Speech from the Throne would have been a wonderful opportunity for the government to put an end to the cuts and state that culture is important in Quebec and not only in terms of cultural development. Obviously, that is also an important component because it is the basis of Quebec society and of the Quebec nation, as it relates to language. And also as it relates to economic development. When a government invests in culture, it too reaps the benefits. We do not understand why the government refuses to sufficiently support cultural businesses in Quebec when they are a major economic engine.

It is also evident from the throne speech that once again there is a desire to continue imposing repressive young offender legislation, as well as to dismantle the Canadian firearms registry. Earlier I spoke of the election campaign. These were important issues in Quebec in the last election. People are very upset by the suggestion that the Canadian firearms registry be eliminated. That is not the approach in Quebec. Most people believe it is important. The majority of Quebecers wanted more control and this tool was the result. Serious events led Quebecers to decide that firearms control was necessary and would help not only the police but society in general.

With regard to the repressive young offender legislation, Quebec has known for many years that it is not the best model. Quebec has really focused on prevention and services to help troubled youth, an approach which has resulted in the lowest crime rate in North America. Quebec has the lowest rates of recidivism and crime and the fewest acts of violence. Our approach has been successful.

Nevertheless, once again, the throne speech indicates that they will continue to go in that direction. We do not understand. We do not see how we can support such a throne speech.

There is another important issue, the federal government's insistence on creating a federal securities commission. Quebec's National Assembly is united on this issue. All three parties unanimously passed a resolution asking the federal government to not proceed with its creation. At present, Quebec has levers that it controls and absolutely wishes to continue controlling. This desire to impose a commission goes against the will of the National Assembly as well as of a vast majority of financial players who say that Quebec should continue to retain these levers.

• (1550)

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two questions.

First, does this mean the member is voting to have an election in 35 days?

I am delighted he brought forward the point about a crime that I referred to a few minutes ago. Could he elaborate on the success of the other types of procedures: alternative sentencing, retraining and sentencing circles that have proven successful?

As I said earlier, the chief of the Ottawa Police and the professors in the field can give the exact examples and stats on how much more successful they have been in making Canada safer and protecting citizens and stopping citizens who have been victimized once from being revictimized. This is obviously where reducing crime and preventing recidivism that has proven successful is the direction to go. The member has mentioned some good examples in Quebec, whereas in the last term the government tried other solutions without that and was roundly criticized by almost everyone with knowledge in the field with the exception of members of its own party.

Could the member add more evidence over and above that which we received from all the experts in the justice committee on that philosophy for improving ways of reducing crime.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his questions. His first question was whether or not we want an election in 35 days. I believe that this question should be directed to the Conservative government. It was the Conservatives who wrote the Speech from the Throne, a throne speech which is unacceptable to the Bloc Québécois and to the majority of the ridings we represent in Quebec. We campaigned against proposals made by the Conservative Party during the election. Seventy-eight percent of people in Quebec voted against the Conservative party's proposals. As we have always said, we defend Quebec's interests. We cannot imagine voting for a Speech from the Throne that basically restates their election campaign rhetoric.

My colleague has asked me to provide other examples. I would be happy to provide him with more examples of successful programs that exist in Quebec. The statistics I cited earlier were obviously general in nature. Quebecers are in agreement: the more we look after our children, especially at a young age, the more we are doing to fight poverty and to lower crime rates. Youth who have short-term difficulties will not fit into the same mould. We will help them and guide them by getting across to them that they have options other than crime.

• (1555)

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I know the Bloc Québécois is against some of the suggested changes to the youth criminal justice system but as we know there was the Nunn report that made a comprehensive study and had some good suggestions.

The Address

We were supportive of all the suggestions but the government seems to have perplexingly just picked a couple of those to bring forward in its platform. I wonder if the member, because he is keen on this topic, would like to comment on that.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: We are going to take a good look at the studies the hon. member mentioned. We are going to take a careful look at them. Then we will be able to give him a more complete answer.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to the throne speech. I will no doubt be repeating the Bloc Québécois' arguments, but I am going to try to make them very clear. The Bloc has a number of comments to make about the throne speech.

We saw the government's insensitivity to the impact of the economic crisis on the people of this country. The government is ignoring the concerns of Canadians, while the United States was already taking action during the election campaign triggered by the Conservative government. The government was oblivious to what was happening, because, according to the Prime Minister, there was no crisis and no cause for concern.

Today, he has changed his tune somewhat, but he seems to be using the throne speech to put off decision making that would be happening if the election had not taken place. We would already have looked at real measures to help people through the economic crisis, and we would be adopting them.

There is a lot of talk about the manufacturing industry, but it has been in crisis since 2003. Moreover, the most recent budget brought down by the Conservative Minister of Finance gave very little support to the manufacturing sector. The throne speech is therefore extremely disappointing, especially to Quebec. My colleague mentioned that 78% of Quebecers had voted against the Conservative Party, sending a clear message to the Conservative government. Yet it is not deviating from the position it took during the election campaign.

The government learned nothing from the most recent election or the message sent by the people of Quebec. The throne speech is an ideological construct. The issue of young offenders was raised earlier. The throne speech is very clear about the direction the Conservative Party intends to take on youth crime.

I would like to quote a paragraph from the section of the throne speech entitled Expanding Investment and Trade.

Canada's prosperity depends not just on meeting the challenges of today, but on building the dynamic economy that will create opportunities and better jobs for Canadians in the future. As one of our greatest hockey legends has observed, we need "to skate to where the puck is going to be, not to where it has been."

It is more like a game of snakes and ladders, but without the ladders, just snakes. This illustrates the government's lack of commitment to taking action and implementing concrete measures to control this economic crisis.

The United States is in the middle of an economic crisis. Americans will be buying less. Consequently, since Canada sells its products to the United States, we will not be protected from the economic crisis.

As I said earlier, the Conservative government does not seem to have a real plan for the manufacturing sector. We would have liked to have seen some concrete measures put forward in the Speech from the Throne, or at least have seen the Conservative government take a stance. For example, we would have been pleased if the throne speech had outlined plans to set up a loan and loan guarantee program to allow the manufacturing and forestry industries to purchase new production equipment or if it had announced the creation of a refundable tax credit for research and development.

The throne speech is not very inspiring in terms of genuine help for the research and development sector or a genuine desire to end tax privileges for oil companies. In fact, the Speech from the Throne does not mention that topic.

The employment insurance fund was another component that we found to be disappointing.

● (1600)

We know very well that we must help manufacturing companies get back on their feet, when plants are being closed right in the middle of an economic crisis. As I was saying earlier, the manufacturing crisis started in 2003, and there have been many layoffs. The federal employment insurance fund has a surplus, and it could have helped some workers through the difficult periods of indiscriminate layoffs.

The Bloc Québécois would like to see some clear direction concerning the abolition of the two-week waiting period, so that individuals can have immediate access to employment insurance. Now, when a person loses their job, there is a so-called waiting period. That person must wait two weeks before seeing their first cheque.

This has absolutely no regard for the difficulties experienced by those who have lost, are losing or will lose their jobs. Even though the crisis will not deal as hard a blow as in the United States, there will still be some very serious consequences for our businesses and industries in the manufacturing sector, for example. In this case, the government should immediately do away with the two-week waiting period, so that individuals can begin collecting EI immediately.

We would also like to see the system improved so that more people are eligible. Since 1993, access to the system has been drastically cut. Now, very few people are eligible for EI. The criteria have been tightened, and it is very difficult to receive employment insurance benefits. But we know that there are billions of dollars sitting in the fund. If we had kept this money and not put it into the consolidated revenue fund, it would still be available to those who are without jobs. We have always said that this is employment insurance, and it should be available to people who contribute to the employment insurance fund.

The Address

We also need to create an income support program for older workers. These measures would cost about \$45 million. It is no secret that a person aged 50 or 55 who loses his or her job has a harder time finding a new job, particularly in the manufacturing sector. It is also hard to go back to school to learn another trade. In situations like that, when people lose their income, how can they even consider going back to school to learn a new trade? At that age, it is more difficult to find another job, even with other skills. It is well known that, these days, employers often prefer younger workers. Older workers may find that they are discriminated against in some situations.

We are very disappointed.

I would now like to touch on another issue. The former minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, the member for Jonquière—Alma, was roundly criticized for making deep cuts to Economic Development Canada. In the Quebec City region, for example, Pôle Québec Chaudière-Appalaches had its funding cut. Quebec as a whole—the chambers of commerce, the Union des municipalités du Québec, the Alliance des Manufacturiers et Exportateurs du Québec, the Government of Quebec, the National Assembly, the Parti québécois and the Bloc Québécois—was against cuts to the funding that helped industries. In Quebec City, for example, the National Optics Institute, a high-tech and photonics research facility, is a major industry. The government made cuts that affect businesses that patent inventions, and that will hurt the high-tech research industry.

Now the government wants to do the same thing with culture. Here again, the newly-appointed ministers do not seem to have stated their true intentions in the throne speech.

For all these reasons, the Bloc Québécois cannot support a throne speech that virtually ignores the economic crisis and its impact on Quebec.

•(1605)

[English]

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, did my Bloc friend across the way have the same sense of missed opportunity that I did when I first heard the throne speech?

Canadians were hoping for a dynamic document, something that would inspire people in these terrible times that we are going into. The throne speech offered nothing for seniors. It offered no child care for young families, no affordable housing and the jobs that would come with it.

Liberals will ask us on this side if we will vote against this and risk an election. My principles say that I am here to stand up for my constituents, the seniors and young families of Hamilton East—Stoney Creek. I definitely will be voting against something as uninspiring as the throne speech.

[Translation]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, this Speech from the Throne is definitely and completely uninspiring in many ways. It overlooks a large segment of the population: our seniors, particularly the workers aged 55 and over who have lost their jobs.

In the midst of an economic crisis, it is important to support the economy and businesses, but support must also be given to social programs. Personally, I think this government did not have its heart in the right place, that is, a little to the left. Governments have certain responsibilities when it comes to social development. Since coming to power, this government has ignored its social responsibilities. We saw this when it did not want to grant full retroactivity for the guaranteed income supplement. It needs to be increased, which is what the Bloc Québécois has been calling for, through certain measures. We hope that the wish list announced by the Bloc Québécois in its press conference will inspire this government in its upcoming economic statement.

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague from Quebec City. She referred to hockey legends who talked about skating to where the puck is going to be. I do not know much about hockey, but that leads me to believe that the Prime Minister does not know any more than I do. If you get ahead of the puck, you run the risk of being off side. If the goalie is out of position the puck just might slide between his legs. I see that the Prime Minister does not understand hockey any more than he does economics, even though he wanted to teach it. .

I would like to ask my colleague a question. She spoke about the manufacturing industry. Since 2005, manufacturers have been losing money. In 2005, the Liberals were in power. This situation is the result of the Liberals' economic policy. They were unable to implement potential measures, safety measures, that could have been used to protect the industrial and manufacturing sectors. They did not want to invest in research and development credits to improve the competitiveness of the manufacturing sector. They did not want to invest in research and development in order to modernize the manufacturing industry. The Liberal government of the day missed the boat. The Conservative government has not done any better. Today, it says it will pay attention to the manufacturing sector.

What does my colleague believe the Prime Minister should do as quickly as possible?

•(1610)

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, the manufacturing industry needs huge amounts of money so companies can purchase leading-edge equipment to compete with other companies in Canada and abroad.

Our manufacturing companies need refundable credits for research and development, which would be a huge help. They need refundable credits and not non-refundable credits. If a company is not generating profits, then a tax credit will not do it any good.

[English]

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I graciously stand in the House of Commons in support of the Speech from the Throne. However, before I begin, I would like to take just a few moments to speak to my friends in the chamber.

The Address

First, to you, Mr. Speaker, I would like to offer my congratulations on being appointed as the Deputy Speaker. I know we have all talked a lot about decorum in the House. Certainly we had great discussion about it last week. I know you will do your utmost to ensure the decorum improves in the House. I also know government members will abide by the rules of the House and behave in a manner that is honourable and worthy of this historic chamber.

I would also like to congratulate all the newly elected members. Their desire to serve the community and the country has brought them to the nation's capital. I trust that they will serve with honour and goodwill toward one another.

As well, I wish to congratulate all the incumbents who have returned to the House of Commons to represent their various ridings. Let us work together in the time ahead so we can mitigate the many obstacles that our great nation faces, for united we can overcome even the greatest of obstacles. Let us place partisan rhetoric aside so we can accomplish the great things that Canadians historically have expected from this chamber. That is our duty and we must answer the calls of all Canadians to stop the partisanship and to steer this nation forward.

On a personal level, I must take this moment to thank the many constituents from my riding of Sarnia—Lambton. I graciously thank them for their support in the recent election. It was overwhelming to see the amount of support from the community and I promise all my constituents, regardless of their ideological preferences, that I will serve them faithfully and truthfully and will honour my commitments to make Sarnia—Lambton a better place for all our families. Thanks, Sarnia—Lambton. It can count on staff and myself to work extremely hard for its interests in this, the 40th Parliament of the Government of Canada.

Last but certainly not least, I would like to thank my husband, Bill, and our son, Will, and Tina and Josh for all of their support and love. Family is very important to all of us and a career in politics can definitely take its toll on family life, of which as all of us in the chamber today are aware.

Let us all be reminded of the strength we find in our families and always be aware that the decisions we make in this chamber will affect each and every Canadian family as much as our own. We should never lose sight of the honour we have had bestowed upon us to be here, working daily to better Canada, our communities and ourselves. Thank you for letting me speak on these matters, Mr. Speaker.

On November 19, the Governor General delivered what will come to be regarded as nothing less than a historic throne speech, despite extreme partisan rhetoric speaking out against the measures contained within that speech. The government, led by the right hon. Prime Minister, has appropriately determined that at this critical juncture of our nation's history, it will take bold leadership to brave the coming economic storm that threatens every nation across the globe.

Recently the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance attended an emergency session of the G-20. At this summit, every leader of the G-20 group of industrialized nations spoke about the fact that we faced a global crisis, not just a domestic crisis. This is the most

unique and potentially damaging economic crisis we have faced in years and only defined leadership and strong co-operation in this chamber will ensure that Canada will emerge from these difficult times a stronger nation, a more united nation and a nation that will realize more of its potential than we had ever dreamed of in the history of our Confederation.

I strongly feel that these difficult times call for bold measures and strong leadership and I have faith in the abilities of our Prime Minister and this government to guide Canada through the turbulent waters ahead. This is why I want to speak about what I feel are some of the most important aspects of the throne speech, what they mean to our families, our communities and our very nation and why we need to finally come together to put our ideological differences aside for our great nation.

● (1615)

Currently, economic stimulus is important for industry across Canada. For starters, the construction industry needs a kick-start and the Government of Canada acknowledged this in the 2007-08 budgets and more recently with announcements that infrastructure negotiations will take place with an understanding that money needs to flow as soon as possible to municipalities.

Canada has invested \$100 a million a year in the apprenticeship incentive grant to encourage Canadians seeking a career to consider pursuing various apprenticeship opportunities. This is vital at this point in time. By providing tax credits up \$2,000 for each individual apprentice, all those involved in skilled trades can rest assured that the government will continue to fight for job creation for our young Canadians interested in pursuing careers in the skilled trades. This is why the Canadian government is committing \$3 billion over six years for new labour market agreements with provinces to address existing gaps in labour market programming.

When the investment into skilled trades is paralleled with vital infrastructure investment, it becomes clear that the government understands the path forward in this difficult period for our economy. The government understands that the infrastructure issue is vital in every community, not just for gainful employment and economic reasons but for the very safety of the people who cross the bridges, drive on our roads and drink from our water systems.

By 2014, the government will have invested a record \$33 billion into infrastructure. Various large scale projects have already been announced as priority projects and more will be identified in the coming weeks and months. Canadians, especially our men and women in the skilled labour workforce, can rest assured that there will be shovels in the ground for construction projects and money will flow for vital infrastructure interests.

In order to provide for these various projects and as a form of stimulus, the Government of Canada has and will work constructively with our municipal and provincial partners to approve key projects moving forward.

The Address

There is another key segment of our workforce who I refer to as our unsung heroes. These men and women always put their communities and Canadians before themselves. I am speaking about our farming community.

As Canadians discuss who should receive funding assistance from government coffers at a time when fiscal accountability is at an all-time high, the chamber must recognize the contribution that farmers make to our nation. They put food on our tables, often at much pain to their own families in the trying times our agriculture sector has faced in recent years. However one thing is for certain. When we invest money in Canadian farms, Canadian farmers reinvest that money into our communities. Whether on inputs like seeds, livestock or on new equipment that farmers needs, Canadians can rest assured that agriculture programs like Growing Forward will not just stem the flow of losses from Canadian farms. Rather, this investment will grow the fiscal coffers of our farmers and their communities.

The Government of Canada understands the sacrifices endured over the last several years by farmers and has responded by creating programs like AgriInvest, AgriStability and AgriInsurance. Those programs are the first programs established under Growing Forward and serve to ensure farmers that opportunities in the agriculture sector will be built up in the new economy of this great nation.

We will stand up for farmers where past governments have failed. In addition to this, the Government of Canada will fight for Canadian farmers' freedom of choice for grain marketing in western Canada and will strongly support our supply managed sectors both domestically and internationally.

As we shift from the old economy into new opportunities in science and research, it becomes evident that Canada's new economy will be at the forefront of global research and capability. Funding for projects like the Sarnia-Lambton Research Park in my riding will lead to an estimated 1,000 new jobs in my community. I have already seen this beginning to occur with multiple upstart companies taking formation in Sarnia—Lambton, all with so much promise and potential going forward.

• (1620)

What makes this more remarkable is that investments into new energy projects and research organizations exist alongside the strong petrochemical industry in my riding. What is even more positive is to note that classic energy industries, like oil, gas and coal, are undergoing a renaissance, even in Sarnia—Lambton. Innovation is rampant and has led to clean coal technologies, expansion in existing facilities in my riding and, indeed, across Canada for biofuel production, and even commercial wind and solar farms have sprung up in a region once known strictly for its petrochemical industry.

Let me say loud and clear for the chamber, to the business community and all Canadians that innovation has paid off with huge dividends for Sarnia—Lambton and we will be known as the green valley in due time thanks to the leadership of local industry and other stakeholders and thanks to the investments made by the government.

Indeed, the time has come to realize that cities like Sarnia are home to new and innovative opportunities and investments into science and research, and new energy initiatives have the capacity to completely alter the status quo of our industrial communities.

It is possible to develop new sustainable energy opportunities alongside existing industrial players that have invested into cleaner technologies for the oil and gas sectors and coal. In fact, these investments are absolutely vital going forward and will ensure that as the global economy evolves our industries will be sustainable, profitable and will employ millions of Canadians.

With that in mind, the Government of Canada has set an objective that aims to ensure that 90% of Canada's electricity will be provided by non-emitting sources by 2020. This is a bold initiative that will require partnership with the provinces and territories and will also develop fruitful fiscal rewards for Canadians moving forward with the new economy.

We have world-leading technology in regard to nuclear power and we will capitalize on this. We also have vast reserves of natural gas and petroleum resources. Our great nation is situated to become a true global energy superpower, and the government will guide us to that plateau above all other nations.

Not only will Canada become a true energy superpower, but we must understand that this grants us superb leverage in international negotiations as countries meet to discuss matters of the economy, energy and the environment. Canada will be a global leader in all three of those categories and will achieve prosperity for Canadians in accordance with this reality while providing true and tangible leadership to the rest of the world.

The time has come to shrug off the conditioned response that Canada is a meddling middle power and recognize that this country can shape global affairs for the first time in decades thanks to the leadership of the Canadian government and the tenacity of the Canadian people.

Also of importance I want to take this opportunity to draw attention to a very important declaration in the throne speech that will ensure protection of our most vital natural resource. The Government of Canada will bring forward legislation to ban all bulk water transfers or exports from Canadian freshwater basins. I commend the Minister of Natural Resources and the Prime Minister for taking this bold initiative and for recognizing the importance of this resource. We will protect this resource for Canadians at all costs.

I personally have a major interest in the announcement that the Government of Canada will take measures to tackle heart, lung and neurological diseases. Many of our lives have been affected by these diseases and, hopefully, further investment into these areas of research will ensure a healthier future for all Canadians.

The Address

Furthermore, the government has pledged that we will defeat the stigma attached to mental health issues. Investments by the government intend to build on the work of the mental health commission. Already we have seen monumental investments to mental health issues. I wish to commend the government on prioritizing this matter and on defeating the stigma attached to mental health conditions. The \$110 million investment to the Mental Health Commission for pilot projects is an extraordinary attempt to address this issue head on.

• (1625)

I realize I have covered many areas of importance to Canadians in this speech. I sincerely feel that this government is embarking on a process of change and innovation that is bold and essential for our nation to survive the many obstacles we face. Some of these obstacles are, strangely enough, internalized. However, the foresight of the Government of Canada will ensure that going forward, barriers to internal trade investment and labour mobility will be removed by 2010. This will require innovation. However, we have already seen the right hon. Prime Minister meet with his provincial counterparts in the first of what promises to be many fruitful meetings. There is a broad understanding of the internal limitations being placed on the Canadian economy by such barriers to trade.

The mutual recognition of occupational credentials between all provinces and territories will benefit Canada's labour market and will also assist qualified foreign trade workers who will finally enjoy the same mobility rights as Canadian workers. In an era of skilled labour shortages faced across Canada, this could very well be the difference between overcoming the economic troubles we face or succumbing to the pressures facing our great nation as we shape our new economy.

Yet another trade-related matter of importance that the Government of Canada has shown true leadership toward is the establishment of new trade agreements within the Americas and also in Asia and the European Union. Canada's global commerce strategy will secure competitive terms of access into international markets that will provide incredible potential for Canadian firms and workers and the products they manufacture as we expand our international commerce horizons beyond the current status quo.

In another time of global transition, American president and general, Dwight D. Eisenhower, said, "A people that values its privileges above its principles soon loses both".

I like to think of that quote as very applicable to our current timeframe. We have been blessed in our way of life and yet the privileges Canada enjoys are so bountiful that perhaps we are tempted to lose sight of our principles that have guided us to this prosperity. It is our principles that guided us through the last century to ensure that we fought for the freedom of others while providing a safe, secure nation for Canadians. It is these very same principles that lead our economy to go strong and to ensure we are at the apex of nations across the globe regarding the opportunities we could afford our people. For generations, Canada has stood proudly atop this apex of nations as a beacon of hope to others. Other nations see our principles and our privileges and they yearn for the same blessings that at times perhaps we as Canadians take for granted. It is these same principles now that we must ensure we protect and

enshrine for all Canadians as we move forward in these darkening times.

Despite the troubled times that we perceive across the globe, we are united in the position that our government will do everything necessary to ensure the prosperity, security and future of all Canadians.

This is why I urge all members in the chamber today to heed my words and to accept the task we have in this 40th parliament which is nothing less than to provide a bastion of hope, a safe haven and voices of reason to all Canadians from coast to coast to coast. I challenge everyone to put aside their partisan gamesmanship and join the cause in ensuring that our nation emerges from this time of economic despair as one of the strongest nations in the world. We can accomplish this objective together.

• (1630)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I learned two very interesting things from the hon. member's speech. The first thing I learned is that Conservatives have principles, which is a novel idea in and of itself.

The second thing I learned is that we will be having a meeting with the premiers. This is very interesting because in the first mandate of the 39th Parliament, the Prime Minister could barely give the time of day to the premiers. I think he invited them over lunch once and I think Danny Williams was particularly scathing in his views on the Prime Minister's desires to meet with the premiers.

During the election, the Leader of the Opposition made the suggestion that it would be a good idea to meet with the premiers. However, for his troubles he was ridiculed from one end of the country to the other and it was suggested that was a really lousy idea.

However, one minute after the election, the Prime Minister writes up his Speech from the Throne and puts in the Speech from the Throne that he will be meeting with the premiers, which we actually think is not a bad idea.

I would be interested in knowing the particular principle involved here: ignoring the premiers, ridiculing the Leader of the Opposition or meeting with the premiers?

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Mr. Speaker, we are seeing first-hand some good examples of decorum and co-operation in the House. The whole point of my speech is that we need to work together. To do that, we need to be a little tolerant of other people's thoughts and ideas.

The right hon. Prime Minister has made it very clear that he will be meeting with other premiers across the country. We will be working co-operatively with the provinces and the territories in many different areas. As we move forward in the country to address the issues that we face, issues that differ from area to area, we know we need to continue to collaborate with all those involved to bring our great country through this crisis.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Sarnia—Lambton for her speech.

The Address

I know the member for Sarnia—Lambton very well, since we sat together on the Standing Committee on Health and the Standing Committee on Status of Women. I believe her comments are sincere. However, I wonder if the member realizes that for the third time now, in the third Speech from the Throne that her government has presented, women are virtually ignored. Women are referred to only a few times, and even then, only in reference to the “men and women” of this country.

I find it odd that when the government addresses a whole community, a whole nation, a whole people, when it addresses Quebecers and Canadians, that it makes no mention of 52% of the population, a group that is very deserving, if not more deserving, since it is even more vulnerable to the current economic crisis. The speech did not provide for any measures or incentives to ensure that women will not suffer from the economic crisis.

I would like to know why my colleague thinks this the case.

• (1635)

[*English*]

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Mr. Speaker, the member and I have worked together on different committees over the last couple of years. I have enjoyed her input and the value she has placed on the issues that she is working toward.

The one thing we have to remember is we just had a general election. The people have spoken once again and entrusted this Conservative government with a renewed and strengthened mandate. The Speech from the Throne was delivered at a time of extraordinary global economic challenge. We are very mindful of the privileges and the responsibilities that we need to address as a government.

Being mindful of that, if people stop and take a look at what is in the Speech from the Throne, we are ensuring that Canada's continued economic success is going to be able to move forward. We are looking at issues that affect all the population. The Speech from the Throne does not address specific segments of the society. It addresses Canadians as a whole. We are looking at reforming global finance. We are looking at ensuring sound budgeting, securing jobs for families and communities, expanding investment and trade and making government more effective. All these things apply to women as well as they apply to men.

We are looking after all segments of society, and the Speech from the Throne certainly tells us that.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member states that 90% of Canada's electricity needs will be met by non-emitting sources such as hydro by 2020.

How does the member plan to do that unless the federal government commits to an east-west power grid so clean hydro power can come to Ontario and Alberta markets from Manitoba, from where a big chunk of the potential hydro power would come?

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Mr. Speaker, non-emitting power sources are a priority for the government. When we are talking non-emitting power sources, we are not just talking about hydro-electric.

That definitely, as we all know, is one of the very good sources. It is one of the areas that we are looking at improving and getting more

power from, but there are other sources as well. We are looking at wind power, solar power and the bio-industrial conversions. We are looking at all these things.

In fact, my riding of Sarnia—Lambton is home to the largest solar farm in Canada. This is in the process of being developed. The first solar panel started to be installed a couple of weeks ago. This is a huge thing. There is government involvement and government support for all these sources.

If we look at the area along Lake Erie, there are huge wind farms. Therefore, it is not only hydro power; it is all these other issues that we are looking at as well.

• (1640)

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I want to commend my colleague for an excellent summary of the direction in which the throne speech is taking our country. There is great leadership on the part of the Prime Minister, with broad strokes outlining how we will address the economic challenges facing us.

However, last evening I had the opportunity to participate in the Consumers' Choice awards in Vancouver. That is where we celebrated the best, the brightest and the most successful of our business people, people who run small and medium size businesses and also larger ones.

One of the messages they gave to me was they commended us for reducing taxation on businesses and corporations, especially during these very tough economic times. Yet I still hear from our opposition colleagues, the NDP, the Bloc and a few from the Liberals, insisting that somehow corporate taxes should be increased.

What is my colleague's opinion on the folly of increasing taxes on corporations and small businesses during these very difficult economic times.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Mr. Speaker, it is not in anyone's best interest to start increasing taxes at a time of grave economic difficulties. I do not believe that anyone can be taxed out of a problem.

That was one thing we heard over and over again at election time. People did not want the carbon tax or more taxes. They appreciate what the Conservative government has done. They appreciate the fact that the Conservatives have lowered taxes for individuals and corporations and they want us to continue in that way.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Ajax—Pickering.

I want to begin by expressing my thanks to the voters of Malpeque for allowing me the privilege of representing them in Ottawa again. It is certainly an honour to do so. I appreciated very much hearing their concerns during the election and I will continue to put their concerns forward in this place.

I also want to thank those on my campaign team and volunteers for their tremendous effort and the confidence they placed in me to represent the riding once more.

The Address

The Speech from the Throne is the government's first opportunity in a new Parliament to outline the direction in which it wishes to take the country. It should be a statement of substance given that from it will flow the kinds of legislation the government believes will be in the best interest of our country. However, this throne speech is different, for it is based upon government actions that have greatly diminished its ability to perform the tasks that governments should be able to perform in tough economic times.

There is one party responsible for destroying the ability of our country to face these difficult economic times, and that is the government sitting across the way. The member for Sarnia—Lambton just talked about sound budgeting. That would really be a novel idea for that government. If we had sound budgeting, the country would not be facing the difficulty that it is facing right now from coast to coast to coast. The government took a surplus given to it and basically squandered it away.

Governments have an obligation to, at a minimum, ensure that Canada's financial house is in order. Previous Liberal governments did that. We took the \$41 billion deficit left by the Mulroney Conservatives and not only eliminated it, but left the current government with a \$12 billion surplus, the contingency fund, to be called upon in tough economic times. What did the current Conservative government do? It squandered it.

In two short years, the government has moved from being the economic envy of the western industrialized world to putting Canada on the brink of deficit. I believe the Prime Minister was talking about deficit over the weekend, a word he would not utter and be honest about during the election campaign. In two years it moved from a strong, central government holding financial reserves to assist in troubled times to a weakened centre with the financial cupboards practically bare.

No longer do we have the prudent planning with financial resources to partner with provinces and industries in time of need. The government has squandered that away and that is a sad commentary at a time when Canadians really need the central government in our country to assist them in their time of need. The government has squandered the cupboard bare.

Clearly, the Prime Minister is now admitting that the country is on the brink of deficit, something he denied during the election. However, he still fails to accept responsibility and any government should be accountable and responsible. The Prime Minister should admit that his Minister of Finance was wrong in terms of how he budgeted the country. The Prime Minister should admit that he was misinforming Canadians during the election process.

As I said, he fails to accept responsibility. Let us look for a moment at the report by the Parliamentary Budget Officer, a position established by the Conservative government. On page 16, it states:

The weak fiscal performance to date is largely attributable to previous policy decisions as opposed to weakened economic conditions...Tax revenues are down \$353 million year to date compared to a year earlier, due in large part to recent policy measures, such as the second one-percentage point reduction in Goods and Services Tax and reductions in corporate income taxes.

How bad could this situation become? According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the deficit could reach \$3.9 billion next year and \$14 billion the year after. I hope he is wrong, but the

government has to accept responsibility for the position our country is now in. If nothing else, these kinds of numbers are a confirmation of economic mismanagement at a level unseen in Canada since Brian Mulroney and the Conservative government of that time.

• (1645)

On the deficit issue, the Minister of Finance was absolutely convinced that the measures the government had taken last February were sound. However, this is the same finance minister who drove the Ontario government into deficit when he was minister of finance for that province. It is no wonder we are seeing the concerns on finances in this nation today. In fact, he is the same finance minister who said, "Do not do business in Ontario". What a shame. His advice was taken and that is a problem.

If the title of the throne speech, "Protecting Canada's Future" means anything, it will mean the government taking a substantially different direction in this Parliament than it did in the last.

Let me speak for a moment on the issue of agriculture spending. There were some questions and responses in the House today. We know for a fact, from members' speeches on the government side, that the government is claiming it put more money into agriculture. The facts do not bear that out. The fact of the matter is the government spent \$1.1 billion less in program spending than the previous Liberal government did at the end of its term.

What about spending on agriculture on Prince Edward Island? These are the facts. In 2005 the Liberal government provided to Prince Edward Island farmers, through program spending, \$45.9 million. According to the numbers provided by Agriculture Canada, Island farmers lost \$15.3 million in the first two years of the Conservative government. So much for good economic planning on its part.

The throne speech stated that the Conservative government will "review all program spending". That worries me a lot. The question is, what will that mean for our farmers on Prince Edward Island? What will that mean for seniors across this country? What will it mean in terms of program cuts already in place when we still have some industries struggling in this country.

In my own province we have had serious crop losses in potatoes and field crops this fall. The Minister of Agriculture announced 1¢ per pound for those crops lost in the field, which farmers in Prince Edward Island deem an insult.

The government has to do better than that. Cuts and further cuts in program spending will not be the answer. We need additions to program spending for certain industries in this country.

On the environmental issue, which was an issue during the election there was no question about it, while the speech talks about tackling climate change, it says little of the costs of the approach that the government will be taking.

We do know that the government's "Turning the Corner" document, published and distributed in March 2008, stated with respect to estimated economic impacts the following:

Our modelling—

The Address

That is the Conservative government's modelling.

—suggests that Canadians can expect to bear real costs under the Regulatory Framework...these costs will be most evident in the form of higher energy prices, particularly with respect to electricity and natural gas.

However, these changes will come at a cost for Canadians. Negative impacts from the Regulatory Framework on Canada's real GDP level will be small over the next 5 years but will gradually increase,—

That is another burden that the government failed to admit during the election, that it will impose upon Canadians. I am worried about a lot that is in the throne speech in terms of cuts to program spending, cuts in the federal public service, and the way the federal government has operated during the last election. We need more support under infrastructure, under regional spending, under program spending for agriculture and for fisheries, for improvements in small crafts and harbours. That is what we need as we go into this downturn in the economy that, in part, was caused by the Conservative government.

I look forward to the government coming forward with a positive economic agenda, not a negative one.

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member about supply management. The government says that it will energetically defend this principle. I suppose the member has confidence in the government; after all, he will be supporting the throne speech. That means he supports the fact that the government will energetically defend supply management.

However, I would like to point out that Conservative ministers have made contradictory statements on this subject. Let us not forget that, over the past few months, the Minister of International Trade and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food have made repeated statements that reveal the government's true intentions.

For example, the former minister of International Trade said that, sooner or later, Canada would have to consider ending supply management. The former minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food said that agricultural producers under supply management were making it hard for the government to protect Canadian interests at the WTO and that they should prepare for some compromises.

Can the member tell me what he stands for in voting for the throne speech? Is he supporting the government's commitment to energetically defending supply management, or is he supporting statements made by former ministers?

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, let me lay it on the table. If the government is saying it is energetically defending supply management, then I am really worried. We cannot really believe what government members say on that issue.

A deal was on the table at the last WTO negotiation. The government did not agree to it, but it did not disagree to it either. What saved Canada's supply management producers' bacon was the fact that India and China basically pulled out of the deal. Otherwise, what would we have had from the minister over there? We would have had an agreement which would have reduced tariffs and would have increased market access into Canada.

That is what was on the table. The Conservative government was willing to coalesce on that issue. That would have destroyed supply management in this country.

We will see, when the time comes, whether or not these words in this document are truthful or not. What was certainly on the agenda at the WTO, that the minister and the international trade minister were agreeing to, was a sellout of supply management in this country.

• (1655)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems passing strange that while I do not doubt my hon. colleague's enthusiasm nor his volume when decrying the policies of the Conservative government, it stands against the evidence that his party and his votes will show when this is brought up for a vote as it has the 42 previous times when the government stood in confidence in this House.

I have heard the hon. member's Liberal colleagues talk about the great benefits of the employment insurance program or the national health care system. When New Democrats in the past have worked in minority Parliaments to get things done, we have always made it our measure to exchange our support for something concrete and real, actual shifts in policy from government. Yet the Prime Minister in this Parliament and in the previous one knew he could count on Liberal support while giving up nothing of the agenda that my hon. colleague has just cited and decried.

What exactly has the Liberal Party done to ensure that some of the policies it pretends to support actually manifest in the real world?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, there is one thing about the Liberal Party and that is that it lives in the real world while the NDP lives in the clouds and can be irresponsible as the fourth party in the House.

The member talked about the employment insurance program. If it were not for the Liberal Party, there would not be an employment insurance program in Canada. If it were not for the Liberal Party, there would be no medicare in this country. If it were not for the Liberal Party, there would be no supply management system in this country, which we are talking about defending today. The member should stand in his place and thank the Liberal Party for all the good it has done for Canadians since the beginning of Confederation. That is what the NDP should be doing instead of playing silly games.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking the residents of Ajax—Pickering for the profound honour of returning to the House and having the opportunity to once again represent them. It is indeed very humbling and I could not be happier to be back.

When I was knocking on doors and talking to people, I could not help but notice this was a very different election. It was different because the issues are so large and the challenges that people are facing are so difficult. I have been in elected office now for 11 years, seven municipally and over four as a member of Parliament. Never before have I seen such anxiousness in people's eyes when talking about issues that are in front of them. People are worried about their jobs. People are worried about how they are going to be able to pay for their mortgages.

The Address

I have talked to people who have been laid off, who had planned their entire lives being with one company and having a pension, only to be laid off from that company, have their pensions become non-existent and be given payouts that they cannot use for their future. They have no idea how they are going to fund their retirements. It was clear that being re-elected this time carried with it an additional weight, a weight that perhaps members have not seen for a long time because people, more than ever, are turning to their government and members of Parliament to find solutions and are requiring bold action.

There could be no greater imperative in a time of challenge like the one we are in to start off by being honest, by ensuring that we tell people the real goods about where we are at, and the challenges we are facing. In that regard, it is deeply frustrating to have the government continue to not tell the truth, frankly, when it comes to where exactly we are.

It was only a couple of weeks ago, during the election campaign, when the Prime Minister adamantly said there was no deficit, that the government was not going to run a deficit and, in fact, it would be stupid to do so. Yet now, mere weeks later, we are being told a deficit is inevitable, that we have to accept it, and it is going to be a part of our reality for the coming days and years.

Those who are facing problems with respect to their pensions, earnings, and watching billions of dollars disappear from capital markets were told it was a good buying opportunity during the election. Since then, we have seen markets come down over 20%. The reality is we are not getting the fundamental truth about our fiscal situation. It is being downplayed or sloughed off. We are using expressions like "technical recession" when people are facing real challenges and need real leadership.

Perhaps the area of greatest concern at this particular moment is in the auto sector. The big three have gone to Washington and so far have been unsuccessful in finding a way out of their very difficult path. The reality is that the new administration in Washington is not going to come until late January and it is going to be too late by then certainly for some of the companies that need assistance right now, that need a plan.

If we do not do anything, if we continue sort of a *laissez-faire* attitude that has been so pervasive from the government over the last three-plus years, we are going to be in a situation where the Americans are going to come forward with a plan and they are going to demand the repatriation of American jobs. We are going to watch Canadian jobs move from Canada to the United States and watch one of the most vital industries to Canada, certainly a vital industry to Durham, be eroded piece by piece until we are left with something that is a shadow of what it was.

People demand action on that and they demand answers. Simply waiting for Congress to take a position, which is obviously going to only predominantly benefit the Americans, is something we cannot afford to do.

The second thing that I think is deeply troubling from the government is that it is only recently that it has even begun to acknowledge that there is in fact a crisis when it comes to climate change. Now it is to the point where it is saying there is a problem

and it is using some language. It has introduced a couple of vacuous plans to pretend that it cares, to feign interest, but we have to do so much more than that.

It was one thing when the Americans were so far behind us in dealing with the environment, but now that a new administration is coming in and it recognizes that the new economy is going to be driven by post-carbon technology, it is imperative that we get on board this train and do it in an awful hurry. With Europe far ahead of us and the United States soon to overtake us, if we are without a plan and continue the attitude of doing nothing and crossing our fingers, we are in enormous trouble.

If we thought the Internet was a boom, if we thought that new technologies around bandwidth and using the Internet was something that was spectacular in terms of its growth and the number of jobs it created, it is a garage sale compared to the technologies that will drive the post-carbon technologies.

● (1700)

If we are not involved, if we are not at the heart of developing those technologies and making sure there are Canadian success stories, we are going to watch as those jobs are created in Europe and the United States. We are going to continue to lose ground. We are going to continue to be in a difficult place.

Let us think about where our nation was in terms of its ability to meet a challenge only three and a half years ago. We had a \$13 billion surplus, an economy that was strong, and an unemployment rate that was low. We were leading the G-7 across most economic indicators. Let us think about where we are today. All that has been blown bare.

We are now having to look at strategies that are infinitely more creative because we have blown our fiscal capacity. Our ability to meet the challenges that now face us in a period of global turmoil has been gravely reduced because of the government's mismanagement of the public funds and its refusal to ensure, at the bare minimum, that we have a contingency fund. Instead, the government has tried to frame this as if a surplus were a bad thing, as if having a contingency fund were a negative thing.

Without that, there is but one option, and that is a deficit, which is where we are. It means that when difficult times hit, we lack the capacity to take action, and we have to begin to do some of the things the Conservatives are now talking about, such as potentially selling off assets or cutting programs. What worse time could there be to sell into a firestorm, to get rid of government assets at the worst possible time, to cut back programs when people need them the most which affects those who are most vulnerable?

We should take a look at some of those who are the most vulnerable and in most need of action, at some of the areas where the government is most silent.

We talk about crime. The government talks about its focus on getting tough on crime. The truth is it could not be softer on the sources of crime.

The Address

We take a look at youth at risk and the money the Conservatives are cutting from those programs, and the refusal to go aggressively after those early indications that people are going down a dark path, the refusal to engage those who have so little hope. We recognize that if we really care about getting rid of crime, we have to go after what causes it. We have to look at communities that feel they do not have a future. We have to look at individuals who are growing up with very little hope. We have to deal with that, and the government is refusing to do it.

With respect to poverty, there has to be an acknowledgement by the government that there are people without opportunity. There are people who are working hard to make ends meet yet they are unable to afford even the basics such as groceries, electricity or their monthly rent. Even after working many hours, there are people who are left in such a precarious position and they are wondering about their future. If they lose their jobs they could be over the edge in a moment. There is no plan to deal with that. There is no plan to help those people, to lift them out of their situations.

As if that were not bad enough, from a position of compassion, the impact on the economy is devastating. The more people who are pulled out of the system, the more individuals who are not spending locally, are not driving the local economy, and are not able to make a meaningful contribution to society. That deepens the spiral and makes the situation much worse.

Those quiet voices that we should be most listening to as government, those people who need our help in the greatest way are the ones who are being most ignored by the government.

For cities and communities, we talk about municipalities facing grave challenges with the massive infrastructure deficit. The government has spoken very little about the need for infrastructure. This should have been a central piece of the Speech from the Throne. There is a need to drive infrastructure in a way that shows bold vision and recognizes that if we do not spend on infrastructure, we are not going to have a strong economy, that recognizes that cities and communities are not to be scolded, put down or talked about in dismissive terms, as has been done, but that they are the engines of our economy and if they are allowed to suffer and erode, then we do not have a future as a country.

The reality of the throne speech is that it fails to be anything more than a collection of rhetoric. It is more spin and gloss without any substance.

Members of this House have an obligation to take real action on these issues, to work together and to be honest about the challenges that we have in front of us.

• (1705)

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member for Ajax—Pickering was spinning us a tale, a tale that forgot about the history of our economy going back to the 1980s. The member may not remember this because he would have been quite young at the time, but in the early 1980s we also suffered a recession in Canada. It was a recession that was caused by the Liberal Party which had an ideology that did not serve the best interests of Canadians. We were left in serious straits which we only came out of when a new Conservative government was elected in 1984.

It is interesting that the recession of that day was driven by high taxes, high deficits and a very high national debt. What is different today? We have an international economic meltdown and yet Canada is still the best placed nation with the strongest economic fundamentals. Unlike the 1980s when the Liberals through their ideology caused such a terrible recession with high taxes and high deficits, today we have paid down \$40 billion worth of debt, we have reduced taxes and our national mortgage is down. We can look forward with great optimism to the future.

How is it that the member has forgotten the lessons of history and is again talking about spending money to get us out of this recession? How is it that he is now taking an approach that is similar to the failed approach of the early 1980s? Why does he not recognize that the approach by the Prime Minister is one that is based in fact?

• (1710)

Mr. Mark Holland: Madam Speaker, I would start by directing the member to his own leader, the Prime Minister, who has actually said that we need to spend. It is he who said that we have to spend into deficit and that a deficit is now something that is needed and something that we are returning to for the first time since the mid-1990s.

The member talked about lessons in history. There are many reasons I got involved in politics, and the first election in which I was involved in a major way was the election in 1993. I remember reading an article in the *Wall Street Journal* which said that Canada was considered in the eyes of the *Wall Street Journal* to be an honorary member of the third world because of its unmanageable debt and deficit. At that point in time we were running a \$43 billion a year deficit. We were at the bottom of the G-7 across almost every single economic indicator. The outlook for Canada could not have been more bleak. We were weaker against our peers than perhaps at any other time.

Yet we can look at the transformation we were able to undertake as a nation. In international circles it was called the Canadian miracle, to be able to go from that terrible spot we were left in the last time the Conservatives were in power to a position where we led the G-7 across almost every indicator, where our deficit was turned into the opportunity to pay down debt to the point where we were spending \$3 billion each and every year less in interest, where we had a contingency fund, where we were properly managing the finances of the country.

That is the type of fiscal management that I expect. But what mattered most at that time was honesty. It was a finance minister who told us where our nation was, a finance minister who set targets year over year and met them.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the member for Ajax—Pickering but before I ask it, let me congratulate you, Madam Speaker, on your first day in the chair in the House. We are very honoured by your presence. On behalf of the NDP and I am sure all members of the House, it is very good to see a woman in chair. I would point out there has not been a woman in the position of Speaker, Deputy Speaker, or Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole since 1997. This is long overdue. I hope it will restore some of the gender balance in the House. We are delighted to see you there and congratulate you on your appointment.

The Address

In listening to the member for Ajax—Pickering and the whole debate around deficits, the member went back into history with some pride about what his government did in those days in coming out of those deficits. However, let us be very clear that one of the reasons we have a housing crisis in this country is when those cuts were made, it was basically on the backs of poor people. Housing programs were cut.

I wonder if the member would comment on that in terms of history and the fact that we are still suffering from that because we do not have the housing programs that are so desperately needed in Canada.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The member for Vancouver East took much time to compliment me, so the member has 30 seconds to respond.

Mr. Mark Holland: Madam Speaker, the compliments are well deserved.

Poverty is something we have to work on and be serious about. We must set firm targets. If we are to take a historical lesson, it is that we need to set those targets in definitive form so that each and every year we have something against which to measure. That is what we did with the deficit. It is what we need to do with poverty.

I for one certainly intend to speak wherever I can about the need for the House to take action on those that are being most negatively impacted by the harshness of these economic conditions.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Resuming debate.

[*English*]

The hon. member for Nanaimo—Alberni.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Madam Speaker, since you are presiding this evening, let me offer my congratulations to you on joining the Speaker's team and being appointed to assist members of the House not just in this important debate but in managing our House affairs. It is great to see members from Vancouver Island playing a bigger role in the House.

It is a great privilege to take part in the debate in response to the Speech from the Throne, the first debate in Canada's 40th Parliament.

I begin by thanking the voters of the great riding of Nanaimo—Alberni for returning me as their MP for the fourth consecutive term. I am very mindful of the great honour and of the great responsibility that I have to them and so I would begin by thanking them.

I would like to acknowledge my supporters and campaign team who put a lot of effort into our re-election effort. I acknowledge the leadership of my campaign manager, Paula Peterson, who coordinated a great effort and ensured that we had a great time working together, and my financial agent, John Ward, who ensured we not only got the job done but given the complexities of financial obligations, that we did it right.

I know the families of every member here make a sacrifice so that we can come from our ridings across this great diverse country to participate in this House. I certainly have to acknowledge the great encouragement, and constant never ending support above and

beyond the call that my wife Helen makes in order to make it possible for me to serve as the member for Nanaimo—Alberni.

The Speaker, the member for Kingston and the Islands, has done a remarkable job of not only being re-elected but for the fourth time being elected as the Speaker of the House. I certainly want to extend my congratulations to him. I think one of our members made reference to this today. It is certainly a historic event, being elected as Speaker for the fourth time and with the different sides of the House it is quite a remarkable achievement that is worthy of recognition.

It falls to each and every member, to our respective parties, to our leaders, to participate in this 40th Parliament at a time when our country is facing the challenges of a very troubled world economy and uncertainties unprecedented in modern times.

My riding is one of the most beautiful in the country. It covers both the east and west coasts of mid-Vancouver Island. From the rugged majestic heights of Mount Moriarty or Mount Arrowsmith in the Beaufort Range, one can look down across the oceanside communities to the east with their shallow, sandy warm water beaches, or west to Port Alberni and beyond to the world renowned Pacific Rim National Park with its famous Long Beach, favoured by surfers, and surf and storm watchers. This majestic place we call home is recognized by being the only federal riding to encompass not one but two federally recognized and UNESCO recognized biospheres, the Clayoquot Sound reserve on the west and Mount Arrowsmith biosphere reserve on the east, where we live.

That said, like other regions, the west coast is caught in a time of transition that has engulfed the forest sector, the fishing industry and greatly impacted our resource based economy.

The Speech from the Throne delivered in this chamber just a few days ago, on November 19, is very different from any I have heard or debated in the past four parliaments. The government has laid out its intentions to manage the economy in this challenging time.

The Speech from the Throne is entitled, "Protecting Canada's Future". The government is committed to ensuring Canada's continued economic success at this time of global economic instability. Under the leadership of the Prime Minister, the Government of Canada has laid out a five-pronged plan to protect Canada's economic security. I shall briefly summarize those points.

First, there is reform of global finance by working with our allies and trading partners to re-examine and renew the rules that underpin the global financial system. This process has already begun with Canada's participation in the G-20 meetings on November 15 and the recently concluded APEC meetings in Lima, Peru.

It is probably appropriate at this time to mention that the World Economic Forum rated Canada's banking system as the best in the world.

● (1715)

I hear someone applauding. That is worthy of note and applause. I appreciate that enthusiastic response.

The Address

However, at a time when the world itself is reeling, it is good to know that while we face challenges we have some strong attributes to bring into these unstable times.

Measures taken to allow the Bank of Canada greater latitude in responding to world shifts and economic shifts allowed the Bank of Canada to respond quickly with nearly \$20 billion to improve liquidity at a time when the credit crunch was having a devastating effect elsewhere and certainly challenging our economy here at home.

Further measures to protect our mortgage system, with shorter terms and mandatory down payments, helped to prevent the type of meltdown that precipitated the current U.S. and worldwide financial crises.

We want to ensure sound budgeting so that Canada does not return to ongoing unsustainable structural deficits while putting all federal expenditures under the microscope of responsible spending.

I think the operative word there is “all” government spending. It is a time when we need to examine how we are spending. As any family would when times get tough, we need to look at how we are managing our finances and determine that we are making the best investments and strategic investments at a time when times are leaner.

We need to secure jobs for families and communities by encouraging the skilled trades and apprenticeships, supporting workers facing transition and providing further support to the automotive and aerospace industries.

On that point, I was asked to respond to criticisms from the forestry CEOs in my own community objecting to this commitment. Of course they are facing a crisis of their own with an industry in transition. I will return to this point shortly to address their concerns.

Further, we need to expand investment in trade by modernizing investment, competition and copyright laws while working with the United States to address shared challenges and pursuing trade agreements in Europe, Asia and the Americas.

Canada just recently signed a trade agreement with Colombia that will need to be ratified. Negotiations continue with other countries in Europe, Asia and the Americas, but we must expand our markets beyond our dependence on one large market south of the border. About 85% of our trade is currently going south and, as we know, at a time when our largest trading partner is in big trouble. It is a good time to be looking to other markets to diversify, stabilize and share our financial opportunities with other nations and to reduce our dependence on one factor. It seems a very appropriate thing to do and I think it is absolutely essential that we do this.

Further, we need to make government more effective by reducing red tape, fixing procurement, improving program and service delivery and improving the management of federal agencies, boards, commissions and crown corporations.

Again, I think “efficiency” is the key word in tough economic times. It will be appropriate for all levels of the Canadian economy to examine their efficiency in delivering services and ensure we are doing so without waste.

Returning to the issue of assistance to industry, I think it is fair to say that while details of any assistance to the auto and aerospace sectors are in the process of being worked out, it is important to mention that many steps have already been taken to help all sectors of industry and business. It is a very competitive and challenging time, which is why, in addition to measures to help all taxpayers, measures were brought in to help students, seniors and, indeed, to lower taxes for every Canadian.

However, the government acted in the previous budget and in the previous economic update to lower small business and corporate taxes.

We acted earlier to resolve the softwood lumber dispute with the U.S., bringing more than \$4 billion back to Canadian forest companies. I think it is a very good thing we did that. Given the challenge that we face now with the U.S. caught up in its own challenges, it is a very good thing that we had that resolved when we did. Even though it is not perfect and there are still challenges for sectors in transition, the fact that we made those provisions beforehand was very helpful to the current economic status of those industries going through transition.

We provided a billion dollar community development trust to help communities with economies in transition and incentives for companies to purchase new machinery and to upgrade equipment.

● (1720)

For the mining industry, the government will extend the mineral exploration tax credit. Further, for the forest and fishing sectors the government has acted to extend support for international marketing efforts and to provide incentives for creating energy from biomass.

I can assure persons concerned from the coast, particularly those in the forest industry, that there will be no blank cheque to any industrial sector. I am sure that any support offered by taxpayers through the government to the aerospace or the auto sector will only come after all stakeholders also contribute in the transition to a sustainable future. I think an example of that might be the \$82 million commitment to Ford to develop an energy efficient engine.

This is not about helping industries that are not producing something that will be of value in a competitive and changing market. It is about creating sustainable opportunities for the future and creating a sustainable auto industry.

The Address

An example in my own riding of a company that has made heroic efforts in transition to a cost effective and sustainable future is the Nanaimo Forest Products Ltd. that took over the Harmac pulp mill in south Nanaimo. This company bid on a court ordered sale of the mill. It has an ownership structure that is quite unique in the industry. It has 200-plus employees, each of whom made significant personal investments in the mill to the tune of \$25,000 each for a 25% stake in the business, partnering with other business interests. Pioneer Log Homes is a tremendous corporate citizen. Totzauer Holdings and the Sampson Group are successful private companies. They each took 25% shares in the company.

With both employees and management having a stake in the success of the business has led to a very collaborative approach to labour relations. No labour contracts will need to be renegotiated until well into the future.

This mill is in a great location. It has a deep sea port, water resources and water treatment facilities. It has the potential to diversify into energy production. I use this as an example of all the stakeholders collaborating in a tough competitive market to make something happen and to sustain an industry that was in big trouble. We might have lost the mill. I think the community is extremely proud of its effort and we certainly want to see heroic efforts like these rewarded with success.

In a time of transition, we do need to collaborate and work together to ensure opportunities for success emerge from challenging times.

The Speech from the Throne addresses a whole range of other issues. We have a commitment to Canada's environment. We will continue with our process to reduce greenhouse emissions 20% by 2020. I am pleased to see that we are working toward continuing with alternative energy incentives to develop alternative energies.

We will be recommitting the ban on bulk water exports, which I know is an important issue to many people in my riding, and I am glad to see that mentioned in the Speech from the Throne.

Further, our government will be helping all Canadians participate by improving the universal child care benefit, increasing access to maternity and parental benefits under employment insurance and helping Canadians who care for loved ones with disabilities. That is a very important step the government can make, even in difficult times, to help those families who are working with a disabled child or a disabled adult at home and who are giving up other economic opportunities to look after a loved one in challenging circumstances.

We will be continuing to work on keeping Canadians safe by strengthening the sentences for serious criminal offences. We will be putting in place new rules for food and product safety and we will be introducing a new national security statement. We are also continuing to contribute to global security.

I will come back and talk about food and product safety in just a moment but perhaps I will go on to talk a little bit about sovereignty in the Arctic.

I am personally very pleased to see Canada's commitment to the Arctic moving ahead. It is a time when there are unprecedented not only changes in the Arctic but also challenges to our sovereignty and

to the wealth and economic opportunities that northern Canada represents.

• (1725)

I am glad to see the commitment to assert our jurisdiction over lands and waters in the Arctic archipelago under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and to further expand our jurisdiction over the region under the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act requiring mandatory notification of any foreign vessels entering Canadian territorial waters. That will be asserting our control over a 200 mile limit into the Arctic.

I am glad to see that we are also proceeding with a new polar class icebreaker named in honour of the late great Prime Minister John G. Diefenbaker.

I have already mentioned the bulk water exports and that is important.

I will now return to efficiencies. It will be important for us to visit every sector of the economy to ensure we are actually producing the best product in the most efficient manner. One of my big concerns is in the area of health care. If we look back to the 1990s, British Columbia's budget for health was about 30% of its expenditures. When I first ran for office it was 40% of the provincial budget. It is currently about 44% or 45% of the provincial budget. Even though we are spending more and more of the provincial budgets on health care, it seems the demand is unceasing and the perception is that somehow the government is not delivering on health care.

We have been encouraging innovation in every sector but health care has been slow to embrace innovation. About 30% of our health care is already delivered outside of the public system. I am not talking necessarily about parallel systems. I am talking about efficiencies. I am talking about services that are currently available but perhaps underutilized and not funded by provincial plans under section 2 of the Canada Health Act, extended services.

There are tremendous opportunities. However, in our zeal to regulate I hope we do not become overzealous to the point where we take opportunities away from advancing health care opportunities for Canadians. I would suggest that perhaps status quo forces have been slow to pick up advances in low cost alternatives like vitamins, minerals, amino acids and the way we regulate our natural health products. I think we need to take a very good look at that.

I know a lot of concerns have been expressed in the House not only in the last Parliament but going back to the 37th Parliament when I introduced Bill C-420 addressing issues on how we regulate natural health products. Those concerns were discussed early in the 38th Parliament with the aid of the member for Oshawa and I know there were lots of discussions in the last Parliament under Bill C-51 about how we regulate these products.

The Address

I am concerned that opportunities for Canadians to purchase low cost, low risk, non-patentable products are currently being restricted by regulatory practices. I imagine legislation will be coming forward to address a whole range of health product safety issues. I hope that in this Parliament, when we review these issues, that we will get this right and that we will deliver an outcome that will ensure Canadians have access to low cost, low risk and non-patentable forms of medicines that promote wellness and address the prevention of illness and disease in the first place.

Those are some of my concerns and they are in the Speech from the Throne. I know members have been debating issues for several days now and a lot of ideas have come forward. I am pleased with the Speech from the Throne. It gives us the opportunity to move ahead on a whole range of issues that are of concern to Canadians. We will have efficient spending in our government. We will be addressing safety concerns and crime issues. We want ensure we create safe communities so Canadians can live safely.

● (1730)

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is wonderful to see you in the big green chair. I say that for people who are watching this on their black and white televisions today.

I was very pleased to hear the hon. member say that the softwood lumber deal was not perfect. He is absolutely right. In fact, on Saturday, I was speaking in Fort Frances with Kendall Lundy, who is the owner of a small business called Nickel Lake Lumber, with 16 employees.

He deals with red and white pine. He sells mostly to the United States and they are all value added products, but he is in trouble. When we were chatting, he specifically mentioned to me that some of the billions of dollars that were left in the U.S. with the softwood lumber deal needed to come back to lumber and mill owners across Canada. He was talking about himself in northern Ontario, but also across Canada.

Will the hon. member work with me and the NDP to ensure that money returns to Canada, returns to the hard-working business owners and the hard-working families across Canada and northern Ontario?

● (1735)

Mr. James Lunney: Madam Speaker, I know the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River shares the concerns. I congratulate him on his election and joining us in the House. Coming from a forest and resourced based community as I do, he has the needs and concerns of his community at heart.

With regard to the softwood lumber agreement, I do not think when that conflict arose, that anybody imagined it would go on for six years. Just to remind members, we were facing punishing duties of 27% between the countervail and the anti-dumping duties, a 27% barrier for our products to jump over.

In the last Parliament when the Conservative government was formed, we made it a priority to address this issue. It took a lot of political capital to get any agreement there. If members think this was the biggest issue burning in Washington, many would be disappointed. Washington was not seized with solving this problem.

In fact, the American industry was winning every day that process was under way.

What we were able to accomplish was not a perfect arrangement, but it did bring \$4 billion back to our industry. I do not know when that money would ever have come back, the roughly \$5 billion that had been invested by Canadian companies in duties with the U.S. commerce department. However, that money has come back to our industry.

I know there were members who thought we were on the verge of winning, but it was naive to think that the most litigious country in the world was ready to roll over on this for our benefit. We were facing another round on softwood lumber. The Americans simple renewed the challenge, changed the figures and away we would go for another round. It is very uncertain where we would have been if we had not come up with that solution.

The member has concerns about the company he mentioned. We have a very competitive challenge around the world. Where I come from, we have hundreds of years old Douglas fir prime timber. I know there is fine timber in Ontario as well. We have some of the best timber in the world, but it is facing tough competition from inferior wood products that are glued together with laminates and resins today and are structurally just as sound as our best fir products.

We need to develop more value added products. We need to gain access to markets. One thing the softwood lumber agreement has done is make greater access to U.S. markets, tragically at a time when the U.S. market itself is in great trouble and demand for any products is reduced because of its housing crisis and so on.

It is a complicated issue. I am sure we will all be interested in working together to see the forest sector come out of this stronger than before.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have a great deal of respect for the member. We came into the House together.

I want to ask him about credit cards, but before it is unfortunate that the PMO had him make a speech on the north when none of the points he mentioned were in the throne speech. There was one feeble reference to the north in it, but it was not the one he raised.

In fact, the points he did raise are a bit of a problem for the government. It talked about extending environmental control, but it did not retract the announcement from a couple of years ago about dumping waste in the Arctic. The Prime Minister promised three icebreakers and after our pushing and pushing, he finally came up with one. Therefore, that is a broken promise.

The Address

On my question about credit cards. I hope the member will help us with the onslaught of potential increase in credit card prices for both consumers and merchants. I brought this up in the House before. The retailers are very upset about the escalating and hidden credit card fees. They are upset with the government suggestion that having Visa and Mastercard in all the banks would help the situation. The merchants are very upset that their fees may go up and that they have no control over this. Individuals, if they miss a payment, their fees go up. All of this is in a time of economic uncertainty when businesses and Canadians are having enough trouble.

I am hoping the member will be onside with me in trying to help address the problem of potential credit card fee increases.

• (1740)

Mr. James Lunney: Madam Speaker, I welcome my hon. colleague from the Yukon back to the House. Perhaps I will begin by reminiscing. Like many members here who are just getting to know their colleagues, we had an interesting experience going through orientation some eight years ago. It was at least two weeks before we realized we were not in the same party.

I know the member carries the concerns of the Yukon in his heart. With regard to the comments about Canada's commitment to the north, if he did not catch it in the Speech from the Throne, as all speeches from the throne are, of necessity, somewhat vague or at least general, there were items alluded to in there.

If my hon. colleague paid attention to the Prime Minister's address in the House the other day, these things were detailed in his speech. I am sure he will see us follow through on those commitments.

With regard to the changes now happening economically all across the country, and which are showing up in terms of banks revisiting a whole range of services, we have truly done everything we can to ease up credit, improve liquidity and make more credit available to businesses.

The Government of Canada does not tell the banks how to do everything they do. In terms of managing the fees, I am sure that is something at which we will be looking. We have new measures on competitiveness that are also addressed as part the government commitment to ensure there are tough measures in place to promote competitiveness and to punish anti-competitive behaviour.

I am sure the issues of the credit card fees are ones that will be discussed by the Minister of Industry and members of the industry committee.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, my question for my colleague, and again I would welcome him back, is hopefully an issue that is near and dear to both of our hearts. The commercial fishing fleet on B.C.'s coast has gone through a decimating number of years, one after another, watching hundreds of fishermen choose not to return to the industry.

We have been attempting a small but significant measure with the government. It involves waiving some of the fees that fishing fleets have to pay to the federal government every year. They can add up to some hundreds if not thousands of dollars on boats that are not making any money. As a result, boats have not been kept up to all the safety requirements needed. We have watched the actual fatalities

increase over the last number of years in the fishing fleet as fishermen no longer have the money to spend on the extra pieces.

The comments in the Speech from the Throne to the larger fishing community were very few and not even vague, just disappointing. Exactly what will he be looking for in the fiscal update that will give the fishing community some sense of hope for the future after so many years of near ruinous fishing seasons?

Mr. James Lunney: Madam Speaker, this is not only a tough question, it is a tough situation for people in the commercial fishing sector. On the question with regard to licences, I understand the Department of Fisheries and Oceans currently has a review underway regarding the whole question of fees and licences. I am sure that in due course there will be some response.

In relation to commercial fisheries, I know it has been a terribly devastating time not only in his riding, but in all coastal communities. It is a difficult thing to manage. Climate change has affected fisheries, stocks are down, competition is up. We need to toughen up on some international measures to protect stocks. I know the department is working very hard and with new international agreements to manage many of those tough questions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Thank you, Madam Speaker. First, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment. I am sure you will do well and that you will have the cooperation of all the MPs in this chamber. Before I begin, I would also like to advise you that I will be sharing my time with the member for Laurentides—Labelle.

First, I would like to thank the citizens of my riding of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, who elected me for a third time as their representative here in Ottawa.

The Speech from the Throne is an important exercise for the Canadian parliamentary system. It lays out the path that the government will take in the following months and it identifies its priorities.

Yet, there was nothing in the throne speech about various issues that are a priority for a good number of Quebeckers. Even worse, the Conservative government tabled an ideological throne speech, without giving a thought to the fact that it is in a minority position.

On October 14, Quebeckers sent a clear message to the Conservatives by electing a strong majority of Bloc Québécois members. Quebeckers asked us to continue our work and to represent their interests and values in Ottawa.

Citizens have much to be concerned about in the throne speech given the situation uppermost in the minds of the residents of Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. The Conservative government has completely missed the boat. The throne speech does not address the needs that Quebec considers to have priority.

There is no commitment to improving the employment insurance plan or establishing a support program for older workers. Above all, there is nothing new in the way of assistance to the forestry sector, which has been in crisis for a few years.

The Address

I would like to take this opportunity to give a brief overview of the situation in the forestry sector in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean and in my riding of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord. Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean is one of the largest forested areas in Quebec. It covers 85,688 km², which represents 17% of Quebec's forests. In this region, 23 of 49 municipalities are dependent on the forestry economy and are deemed to be one-industry towns. Essentially, more than one-third of jobs in the manufacturing sector are related to forestry.

For the past few months, the sawmills in Saint-Fulgence and Laterrière in my riding are only operating in order to produce wood chips for paper mills. Meanwhile, another sawmill in my riding, in Petit-Saguenay, is down to one shift. A number of sawmills in the riding of the new Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), the member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, have also halted production. That is the case for Louisiana-Pacifique Canada Ltée in Chambord, which closed its doors for two years. And the Arbec sawmill, which closed. And the sawmill in Girardville, which is down to one shift.

We are not strangers to bad news. A number of communities in my area and in my riding have already been hard hit by the forestry crisis in recent years.

The situation in my riding is no worse than elsewhere in Quebec, but it is representative of a number of ridings which are home to many seasonal workers from the agriculture and forestry industries, among others.

For example, the Speech from the Throne could have been an excellent opportunity for the Prime Minister to propose measures to improve employment insurance. The Bloc Québécois has long been proposing the elimination of the two-week waiting period before people can qualify for employment insurance benefits. This would cost next to nothing.

• (1745)

Benefit rates need to be increased and the qualification period must be reduced to 360 hours. But unfortunately, the Speech from the Throne does nothing to improve the employment insurance system.

As for measures to help the forestry sector, the Bloc Québécois proposed concrete action, but the Conservatives decided once again to ignore those workers. When I heard the throne speech last Wednesday, I was very disappointed because it did not contain any measures to help the forestry sector. The logging crisis that is affecting my region, Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, and many other regions in Quebec is far from being resolved. Many expect 2009 and the years to come to be even more difficult.

Given the growing supply of wood from China and the real estate crisis in the United States, many businesses have had to resort to massive layoffs or have shut down altogether. As a result, if the Conservative government does not do something about it, the situation will become even more devastating.

Since 2006, the Conservative government has left the forestry sector to fend for itself, thereby jeopardizing thousands of jobs. Yet the Bloc Québécois has proposed real solutions to help the industry.

First, the government has to bring back the fund to diversity forest economies. When the former Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec cut diversification funding for the regions hit by the forestry crisis by \$50 million dollars, he caused a major setback for the industry. One of the things that program did was provide assistance to communities and workers affected by the crisis. It was a mistake to slash that kind of assistance. The government could have used the throne speech as an opportunity to announce that it would bring back such a program, but with even greater financial support.

Second, the Bloc Québécois has proposed that a loan and loan guarantee program be created to help finance investments in production equipment. This would provide support for businesses that wish to update their production equipment or simply enable their businesses to expand.

Third, the Bloc has suggested that taxes be reduced for businesses in the manufacturing and forestry sector to help them develop new technologies, or that tax credits be given to encourage hiring. Once again, the Speech from the Throne offers no such measures.

And fourth, the Bloc has for several years been calling for an income support program for older workers. These workers are in a state of despair because there has been no assistance for them. Entire communities are being affected by these lost earnings. The Government of Quebec has made efforts to help older workers, but those efforts will be inadequate as long as Ottawa does not do its part.

These four measures are aimed at helping the forest industry to make the transition toward secondary and tertiary processing and promoting the use of wood in commercial and public buildings. This transition will lead to high value added manufacturing, increase the demand for wood on the domestic market in Canada and Quebec and reduce wood exports.

In conclusion, I call on the two Conservative members from my region, the members for Jonquière—Alma and Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, to follow my lead, get involved and defend the forest industry in my region, Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, which is bearing the full brunt of the forestry crisis, in order to make an improvement in the situation. It is their duty to convince the Prime Minister to take steps to help my region, Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean.

• (1750)

[English]

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to my friend. He raised four strategies he would like our government to adopt to improve the situation in the forestry industry. I will certainly take those strategies under advisement. I appreciate his coming forward with some suggestions that we as a government can look at and process to see if they have the impact of improving our forestry sector.

The Address

However, he made one statement that was somewhat disingenuous. I do appreciate honesty in the House. He made the statement that the Conservative government, of which I am a member, had done absolutely nothing to address the forestry challenges we have in Canada. He knows that is not true.

I want to remind the hon. member that we have a \$1 billion community development trust, which goes a long way toward addressing the concerns of challenged communities. The accelerated capital cost allowance program was implemented under our government. We have returned \$4 billion to the forestry sector under the softwood lumber agreement. We have also introduced \$1 billion of support for western Canada for the pine beetle-ravaged forests and communities that rely upon the pine and lumber industry in British Columbia.

Does the member accept the fact that we have done much to address the forestry challenges facing Canada?

• (1755)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: First of all, Madam Speaker, it is very little. The member mentioned the trust fund created to help the manufacturing and forestry sectors. For Quebec, it represents \$216 million over two years. That is very little and is for both the forestry and manufacturing sectors. Furthermore, the trust was not very fair with respect to the job losses experienced in Quebec. The member spoke about assistance through the fund, which represents \$3,000 per job lost, compared to \$25,000 per job lost in Alberta. This inequity can be seen in the forestry sector. The issue with pine trees concerns the west.

Since this announcement was made over a year ago, there has been one closure after another in my region. This shows that the assistance is not helping, because there are still regular closures being announced in my region and in other regions throughout Quebec.

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened to the member's comments with great interest. It seems something is missing from the member's comments.

He is looking at things as though we were living in a vacuum, as though somehow the government could create a massive market that would somehow replace the U.S. housing downturn. Today I am sure we heard from the Liberal Party that apparently the government is somehow supposed to replace the seven million vehicle sales missing from the U.S. market this year.

These downturns are cyclical. We have seen them before. They are not the fault of the government. The government cannot replace that market, but what has the government done? It has put massive amounts of stimulus into the economy.

Under the heading of imitation being the most sincere form of flattery, today we saw the British Labour government introduce some \$30 billion in reductions to its value-added tax, the tax identical to the GST. We see the British now following Canada's lead. Today we heard president-elect Obama say that he is not only not going to increase taxes, but is going to further reduce taxes, once

again following Canada's lead and following the lead of the Prime Minister and the finance minister. More than a year ago, they had the foresight to act to prepare Canada.

We see Canada outperforming these nations. I encourage the member to take a look at what we have done. We are on the right track.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Madam Speaker, if this government sincerely wanted to help the regions struggling with the forestry crisis, it would have reinstated the economic diversification program for the regions affected by the forestry crisis, which the government cut soon after it took power. One of our measures is to reinstate this program to help the regions.

Fifty million dollars is obviously not enough. Resources also need to be added. If we take Quebec as an example, since 2006, we have lost 21,000 jobs in the forestry sector, and in a small region like mine, 4,000 jobs have been lost. It is time to do something. The situation is urgent.

• (1800)

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Madam Speaker, you will probably notice that my colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord and I have something in common. My speech will touch on the same topics. I also live in a region that is particularly affected by the forestry crisis.

That said, first I would like to take this wonderful opportunity to sincerely thank the voters in my riding of Laurentides—Labelle, who have elected me for a third time. I am keenly aware that they have once again put their trust in me, and I will say once more that I am committed to fully representing them, to defending their interests and to being their loyal spokesperson. I would also like to congratulate each member for their victory in the latest election and, in particular, my Bloc Québécois colleagues. It is both reassuring and exciting to see another large delegation of Bloc Québécois members in this new Parliament. Quebeckers rejected the Conservative ideology when they made their choice. In addition, they chose to elect a majority of Bloc Québécois members because they, meaning Quebeckers, firmly believe that the Bloc are effective in Ottawa.

We keep our promises to the Quebec nation and we will oppose this Speech from the Throne because it reflects an ideology that was rejected by 78% of Quebeckers during the election and does not reflect the consensus in Quebec.

I would also like to talk about the people this visionless Speech from the Throne has forgotten, the same people that the Conservatives have abandoned since their first mandate in 2006 and the same people it seems they are going to continue neglecting. I am thinking about the unemployed, women, the manufacturing and forestry industries, the environment, the homeless, the provinces and, in particular, Quebec and its regions.

The Address

It is extremely disappointing to see that the Prime Minister has not learned a single lesson from the election results in Quebec. On the contrary, he has remained completely insensitive to the growing concerns and worries of Quebecers. In his Speech from the Throne, the Prime Minister has not risen to the occasion and appears to be ready to ignore the situation as if everything were under control, even though things are far from being under control.

The situation is particularly disastrous in my region, which has been hit hard by the forestry crisis. In my region, residents of the RCM of Antoine-Labelle—a single-industry regional municipality—are very concerned about the Conservatives' inaction and neglect. They are concerned and uncertain because hundreds of people have lost their jobs over the past year. Hundreds of forestry industry workers have watched their mills and plants close one after the other. Many of them are too old to retrain and will have to choose between living on social assistance, or, worse still, leaving their region, their community, their town, their friends and their family. They will have to make the terrible choice to leave everything they worked so hard to acquire over the years. It is a shame that the government is bent on staying its disastrous course.

It will come as no surprise to you, Madam Speaker, to hear that during the most recent campaign in my riding, I saw no sign of the Conservative candidate on the ground. He hid out in his basement so that he would not have to answer for his government's irresponsible and inexcusable actions. He was too scared to face the disgruntled unemployed.

As always, the Bloc has taken responsible action in this area. We put forward concrete, intelligent solutions to this crisis. We asked the government to introduce a loan and loan guarantee program for the purchase of new production equipment for the forestry and manufacturing sectors; refundable tax credits for research and development; an income support program for older workers; and an enhanced employment insurance program. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister did not mention any of these things in his speech. At this point, I would like to quote my leader, who said the following in his reply to the Speech from the Throne:

It was the government's job to be clear about its desire to provide a workable plan to support businesses in the forestry and manufacturing sectors. That is a priority for Quebec and its regions. Instead, we got vague promises. Thousands of workers have already lost their jobs in the forestry sector, yet the government is bent on staying its disastrous course.

● (1805)

That sends a terrible message to thousands of workers, communities and regions that rely on the forestry industry: "You are on your own." That is unacceptable.

What wonderful message of hope can the people in my region take from the throne speech? Nothing. They are being told to fend for themselves. This attitude is quite simply unacceptable. That terrible message has devastating consequences for the Upper Laurentians, and the people there have good reason to be angry with the federal government.

Showing drive and motivated by a strong desire to revive the economy in the Upper Laurentians, elected representatives and representatives of various socio-economic sectors rolled up their sleeves and set to work developing other niches, including tourism.

Mont Tremblant International Airport in La Macaza is one of the main sources of economic prosperity in my region. The government now has the duty to support the airport's plans to expand and upgrade its facilities and must settle once and for all the issue of imposing customs charges on regular flights.

All the elected representatives from the Laurentians region worked to have the airport considered on a par with the airports in Montreal and Quebec City. We all celebrated the unanimous adoption of a motion made by the Bloc Québécois. I myself led that fight in this House last June. Now, we want to take the next step. The government must reassure my community and allow the general manager of the airport to sign new commercial agreements without having to worry that customs charges will again be imposed.

We estimate that my region will lose \$9 million in annual economic spinoffs if these new agreements are not signed. The government must act responsibly and take an open-minded approach to my region and all the regions of Quebec.

And it is not just the regions of Quebec that are suffering as a result of the Conservatives' ideological stubbornness. As the Bloc Québécois deputy critic for the status of women, I have to say, unfortunately, that women have been hit hard since the Conservatives came to power in January 2006. Judging by the content of the throne speech, things are not going to get much better.

Women have been hit hard these past two years with cuts to Status of Women and the women's program, the abolition of the court challenges program and the tabling of Bill C-484, which attempted to reopen the debate on criminalization of abortion. By the way, another similar bill is still on the Conservative horizon.

Yet, the Prime Minister promised in the 2006 election campaign and last October to not reopen the abortion debate. Women fought hard to have freedom of choice and there is a strong consensus in Quebec society that the issue has been debated and that it is no longer up for discussion.

What is disturbing is that there is no mention of this in the throne speech. What is even more striking is that the word "women" appears only a couple of times in this famous speech, and is used in a general context without making any commitment to them.

Even more disturbing about the Conservatives' intentions, is the adoption of a resolution concerning the status of the fetus at the recent Winnipeg convention. We cannot help but be very alarmed by this resolution because it comes from the militant grass roots of the Conservative Party.

My colleague from Laval and I demanded that the Prime Minister immediately lay to rest concerns raised by the adoption of such a proposal. Unfortunately, we have to face the fact that the government has no intention of doing so and the temptation is great within the Conservative caucus to reopen the debate.

What does the government plan on doing to clarify its intention of not reopening the debate on abortion? Nothing.

The Address

What does the government plan on doing to put a stop to violence against aboriginal women on reserves. Nothing.

What does the government plan on doing to end poverty, which affects twice as many women as it does men? Nothing.

The answer is clear: the Conservative government will do nothing for women, nothing for the unemployed, nothing for the manufacturing and forestry industries, nothing for culture, nothing for the environment and the homeless.

• (1810)

In closing, I would say that Quebec is still the most forgotten in the throne speech.

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to the speech given by my hon. colleague, Labelle des Laurentides, and I must say her tone is completely understandable. Everything she said accurately represents what was said—or not said—in the Speech from the Throne.

I wonder if my hon. colleague would share her thoughts about the Conservative government's desire to abolish the gun registry.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague, who, like me, is the critic for the status of women. I would like to point out that she is doing an excellent job on behalf of women.

Again in connection with matters concerning women, and although I am not an expert on firearms, I can say that a majority of Quebecers are against abolishing the gun registry and, more specifically, most women oppose abolishing it. If I remember correctly, Quebec is the province that consults the registry the most, and the Sûreté du Québec uses it every day, considering it a vital and truly important tool.

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would also like to congratulate you on your appointment to such an important position in this House. I wish you every success.

I have a question for my hon. colleague, who also happens to be my neighbour. The riding of Rivière-du-Nord is right beside the riding of Laurentides—Labelle, and the two ridings share similar problems. I would like my colleague to elaborate a little on the bill the Conservatives want to bring back, one that is opposed in all areas of Quebec, namely, the bill concerning young offenders. I am sure that through her past experience and her experience as a member of Parliament, she has seen that sending our young children to crime school really is a very bad idea. I would like to hear her comments on this.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague and neighbour from Rivière-du-Nord. I would like to clarify something for my colleague from Laval, who called me "Labelle des Laurentides". It is not yet winter festival time, nor is my riding known as "Labelle des Laurentides". It is actually Laurentides—Labelle.

I am not an expert on justice, but contrary to the rest of Canada, there is a consensus in Quebec when it comes to the Young Offenders Act: people are strongly opposed to it. When it comes to justice, Quebecers have all of the tools they need to support reintegration or to rule on delinquency. Quebec has its own tools, but

it also supports the reintegration of youth. Its approach is primarily preventive, and once again, Quebec stands apart from the rest of Canada because of its position as a society and a nation.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): It being 6:15 p.m., pursuant to order made Thursday, November 20, 2008, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith all questions necessary to dispose of the amendment to the amendment now before the House.

The vote is on the amendment to the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment to the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): All those in favour of the amendment to the amendment will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): In my opinion, the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Call in the members.

• (1845)

(The House divided on the amendment to the amendment, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 1)

YEAS

Members

André	Asselin
Bachand	Beaudin
Bellavance	Bigras
Blais	Bonsant
Bouchard	Bourgeois
Brunelle	Cardin
Carrier	Crête
DeBellefeuille	Demers
Deschamps	Desnoyers
Dorion	Duceppe
Dufour	Faillie
Freeman	Gagnon
Gaudet	Guay
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)	
Laforest	Laframboise
Lavallée	Lemay
Lessard	Lévesque
Malo	Ménard (Hochelaga)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Mourani
Nadeau	Ouellet
Paillé	Paquette
Plamondon	Pomerleau
Roy	St-Cyr
Thi Lac	Vincent— 48

NAYS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Aglukkaq	Albrecht

The Address

Allen (Welland)	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Masse
Allison	Ambrose	Mathysen	Mayes
Anders	Anderson	McCallum	McColeman
Andrews	Angus	McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Ashfield	Ashton	McLeod	Mendes
Bagnell	Bains	Menzies	Merrifield
Baird	Bélangier	Miller	Minna
Bennett	Benoit	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Bernier	Bevington	Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Bezan	Black	Mulcair	Murphy (Charlottetown)
Blackburn	Blaney	Murray	Neville
Block	Boucher	Nicholson	Norlock
Boughen	Braid	O'Connor	O'Neill-Gordon
Breitkreuz	Brisson	Obhrai	Oda
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Oliphant	Paradis
Brown (Barrie)	Byrne	Patry	Payne
Cadman	Calandra	Pearson	Petit
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Poilievre	Prentice
Cannon (Pontiac)	Carrie	Preston	Proulx
Casson	Charlton	Rae	Rafferty
Chong	Chow	Raitt	Rajotte
Christopherson	Clarke	Ratansi	Rathgeber
Clement	Coady	Regan	Reid
Coderre	Comartin	Richards	Rickford
Crombie	Crowder	Ritz	Rodriguez
Cullen	Cummins	Rota	Russell
Cuzner	Davidson	Savage	Savoie
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)	Saxton	Scheer
Day	Dechert	Schellenberger	Sgro
Del Mastro	Devolin	Shea	Shiple
Dewar	Dhaliwal	Shory	Siksay
Dion	Dosanjh	Silva	Simms
Dreeshen	Dryden	Simson	Smith
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Sorenson	Stanton
Dykstra	Easter	Stoffer	Storseth
Eyking	Fast	Strahl	Sweet
Finley	Flaherty	Szabo	Thibeault
Fletcher	Foote	Thompson	Tilson
Fry	Galipeau	Toews	Tonks
Gallant	Garneau	Trost	Trudeau
Glover	Godin	Tweed	Uppal
Goldring	Goodale	Valerioté	Van Kesteren
Goodyear	Gourde	Van Loan	Vellacott
Gravelle	Grewal	Verner	Volpe
Guergis	Hall Findlay	Wallace	Warawa
Harper	Harris (St. John's East)	Warkentin	Wasylcia-Leis
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn	Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Hiebert	Hill	Sky Country)	Wilfert
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Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Kania		
Karygiannis	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)		
Kennedy	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)		
Kent	Kerr		
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)		
Lake	Lauzon		
Layton	Lebel		
Lee	Lemieux		
Leslie	Lobb		
Lukiwski	Lunn		
Lunney	MacAulay		
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie		
Malhi	Maloway		
Mark	Marston		

PAIRED

Members

Lalonde — 2

Bruinooge

The Speaker: I declare the amendment to the amendment lost.

It being 6:46 p.m., this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:46 p.m.)

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