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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, June 11, 2009

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, June 11, 2009

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

•(1005)

[English]

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table a special report from the Canadian Human Rights Commission concerning the freedom of expression and freedom from hate in the Internet age.

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(e), this document is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

COMMISSION FOR PUBLIC COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to table, in both official languages, the annual report of the Commission for Public Complaints against the Royal Canadian Mounted Police for fiscal year 2008-09, pursuant to section 45.34 of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act.

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

* * *

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the

fifth report of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology concerning the study of the crisis faced by certain industrial sectors in Canada.

[English]

The Subcommittee on Canadian Industrial Sectors held 12 meetings, heard from 35 witnesses, and received eight briefs.

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to the report.

[English]

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. In accordance with the order of reference of Wednesday, May 6, 2009, your committee has considered Bill C-26, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (auto theft and trafficking in property obtained by crime), and agreed on Wednesday, June 10, 2009, to report it with amendment.

* * *

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-417, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (inborn error of metabolism).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table a private member's bill, seconded by the member for Ottawa Centre, to establish a medical expense credit for people who require special diets due to inborn errors of metabolism.

This bill would allow people with inborn errors of metabolism, who have been certified by a medical practitioner to require a low-protein diet, to claim the extra cost of purchasing specialized food products as a medical expense on their tax returns. The cost of this diet as compared to the cost of a standard diet recommended by Canada's Food Guide is significant. Under current rules, these people must absorb this extra cost themselves.

Routine Proceedings

This situation was drawn to my attention by Stephen Kelen, a social worker, and Dr. Sandra Sirrs, the medical director of the adult metabolic diseases clinic at Vancouver Hospital. Dr. Sirrs notes that this bill would be an enormous help for those patients and their families whose survival depends on very expensive low-protein food products. She points out that these patients cannot survive on a normal diet, that paying for low-protein foods they need just to stay alive has been a terrible burden on them and their families, and that this bill will ease that burden.

A similar medical exemption already exists for people living with celiac disease. People living with inborn errors of metabolism should benefit from a similar provision. I hope that members will support this measure.

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

* * *

CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER OF CANADA ACT

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-418, An Act to establish a Children's Commissioner of Canada.

He said: Mr. Speaker, as a new parliamentarian, it is a great honour and pleasure for me to present my first private member's bill to create a commissioner for children for Canada, supported by my colleague for Winnipeg South Centre.

Canada ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child almost 20 years ago. I believe that it is now time for Canada to create the position of commissioner for children to ensure that their rights are protected. I will limit myself to reading the very short purpose of this proposed act. It states:

The purpose of this act is to establish an independent official to ensure governmental accountability in respect of the Convention, and to promote, monitor and report on the effective implementation of Canada's obligations under the Convention that are within the legislative authority of Parliament, in order to advance the principle that children are entitled to special safeguards, care and assistance, including appropriate legal protection.

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

* * *

● (1010)

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP) moved:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the Member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, all questions necessary to dispose of this motion be deemed put, and a recorded division be deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, June 16, 2009, at the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst have the unanimous consent of the House to move this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*English*]

The Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS**PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICERS COMPENSATION FUND**

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, and as certified by the Clerk of Petitions, I am pleased to present yet another petition on behalf of public safety officers in Canada.

These petitioners would like to draw to the attention of the House that police and firefighters are required to place their lives at risk on a daily basis, and that employee benefits for public safety officers often provide insufficient compensation to the families of those who are killed while on duty.

The petitioners also point out that the public mourns the loss of public safety officers killed in the line of duty and wish to support in a tangible way the surviving families in their time of need.

The petitioners, therefore, call upon Parliament to establish a fund known as the public safety officers compensation fund for the benefit of families of public safety officers killed in the line of duty.

CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thousands of Canadians have joined the call to stop the Canada-Colombia trade deal.

The petitioners call on Parliament to reject the Canada-Colombia trade deal until an independent human rights impact assessment is carried out, the resulting concerns addressed, and the agreement be renegotiated along the principles of fair trade, which would take environmental and social impacts fully into account while genuinely respecting and enhancing labour rights or the rights of all affected parties.

Labour side agreements under NAFTA, which this agreement is patterned after, have not been effective in protecting and improving labour standards as has been the case in Mexico where over one million agricultural jobs have been lost since NAFTA was signed.

In addition, the murder of labour and human rights activists has increased in Colombia while widespread and very serious human rights violations continue to be the daily reality.

It is time for Parliament to stop this free trade deal.

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour today to present a petition signed by a number of persons from all over Canada, but particularly from Quebec.

This petition is addressed to the House and relates to adoption of Bill C-389. This is a bill which was introduced by my colleague to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act in order to include gender identity and gender expression as prohibited grounds of discrimination and to amend the Criminal Code to include gender identity and gender expression in the grounds for hate crimes and thus fight discrimination and social exclusion of transgender, transsexual and genderqueer people.

* * *

[English]

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 Deputy Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1015)

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—PENSIONS

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, in light of the legitimate concerns of Canadians that pensions and their retirement security may not be there for them in their retirement years, the Government of Canada should begin to work with the provinces and territories to ensure the sustainability of Canadians' retirement incomes by bringing forward at the earliest opportunity, measures such as:

- (a) expanding and increasing the CPP/QPP, OAS and GIS to ensure all Canadians can count on a dignified retirement;
- (b) establishing a self-financing pension insurance program to ensure the viability of workplace sponsored plans in tough economic times;
- (c) ensuring that workers' pension funds go to the front of the line of creditors in the event of bankruptcy proceedings;
- (d) in the interest of appropriate management of the CPP that the Government of Canada immediately protect the CPP from imprudent investment practices by ceasing the practice of awarding managers performance-based bonuses; and
- (e) take all necessary steps to recover those bonuses for 2009, ensuring managers in the future are paid appropriate industry-competitive salaries.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my friend from Outremont for seconding this important motion.

I am most pleased to rise today to speak to the NDP motion and the reforms needed to protect and enhance the lives of Canada's seniors as they live out their sunset years. I am, at the present time, crossing Canada on a listening to seniors tour, and Canadians have been quick to tell me accounts of their fears and their concerns for their futures.

While I was in St. Thomas, I heard from Vanda, who told me how she had to start paying \$90 a month for a prescription that her husband, who had recently had a stroke, needed, because it had been delisted by the province of Ontario. As a result, they did not know

Business of Supply

where the money was going to come from. Especially when people are on fixed incomes, that can be almost a tragedy.

I also heard from Joyce in Elliot Lake, who related how hard her life had become due to the fact that on a yearly basis, she had to pay almost \$2,100 a year for her hydro.

Today, far too many seniors are forced to live this way, just one crisis away from a financial catastrophe. Many seniors are also worried that their private pension plans will not be there for them when they retire, as in the case of Nortel. They wonder if they will have any pension at all.

Seniors are also quick to condemn the bonuses being paid to Canada pension plan executives. They have seen the media reports, such as the case of CEO David Denison, who saw his pay triple since 2005 by taking home bonuses amounting to \$7.4 million. That is in addition to a \$400,000-plus yearly salary.

Seniors are also quick to tell anyone who will listen how unforgivable those bonuses are when so many seniors across Canada are living near or in poverty. The bonuses during good times are already viewed by the public as symptomatic of financial industry greed. Today, given the frightful economic times that we are living through, the fact that the same managers, who lost \$17.2 billion, are expecting and accepting massive bonuses is not only indefensible, it is obscene.

We in the NDP believe in removing bonuses from the administration of CPP and taking away the incentive plan for managers. The one they have now causes them to take potentially unacceptable risks in the investments they make. I do not quarrel with anyone who proposes appropriate industry standards for salaries, but having said this, the game afoot today across the corporate community is to load up salaries with performance bonuses, retention bonuses and other perks.

I recall in the 1970s, when I first joined Bell Canada, talking to a manager regarding our pay practices at Bell. He had a saying, and it is very true, "A fair day's work for a fair day's pay". I agree with that notion and Canadians agree with that notion, but I would suggest the corporate community, especially the financial community, has forgotten just what fair is. Never mind that according to economist Toby Sanger, in the last 10 years, the CPP fund would have made \$13 billion more than it did if it had been invested in government bonds, rather than in a diversified portfolio of equities, real estate and bonds.

These managers have not been producing value-added returns above risk-free bonds, and over the past four years, they have not achieved the returns required for the long-term sustainability of CPP.

These managers have repeatedly defended their bonuses by pointing out that their performance is graded according to a rolling four year average of the fund's performance. My reply to them goes like this. In the fiscal year 2009, the losses in the fund wiped out four years of contributions, and the fact that senior managers are still in line for bonuses is simply not acceptable.

Recently at the House finance committee, Phil Benson from the Teamsters Union said:

Business of Supply

The performance bonus should be, "Guess what, folks? We're in a recession, tough times, but don't worry. Your pension is still there". That's a performance bonus.

One thing I am sure of is that Canadians will appreciate the section of today's NDP motion which demands that government secure the repayment of those bonuses.

• (1020)

The genesis of my seniors tour came about when I was visited by a prominent seniors group. One of my guests stated to me that seniors feel invisible to their government. This group was also wondering why their government has given \$14 billion in yearly corporate tax breaks while doing nothing for them.

Last fall I told another story in this House that is worth repeating. It is the story of a senior who came into my office with a letter in his hand from the government saying that his pension had increased by 42¢. He was so upset he had tears in his eyes. He said that not only does the government not give a damn about seniors, but it goes out of its way to insult them.

As we face down the worst economic crisis in 70 years, Canadians have been vividly reminded why we have a social safety net in the first place. I say to members today, now is the most opportune time in our recent history to undertake a complete review of the benefits paid under OAS, GIS and CPP. This must be done with an eye to increasing benefits immediately to raise seniors out of poverty.

Recently an economist at the Canadian Labour Congress reported that an annual infusion of \$1 billion would raise all seniors above the low-income cutoff. According to Statistics Canada's 2004 estimates, there were 219,000 Canadians living below the low-income cutoff, which is the way many organizations measure poverty in Canada. An even more sobering statistic is that of the 219,000 seniors living in poverty, more than 60% were single, unattached women. That is nothing short of a national disgrace.

It is clear that with the bailout of GM and our ballooning deficit, this is not a time of business as usual in Canada. I would suggest if the federal government can buy a serious stake in two auto plants, Canada can afford to invest in those plans designed to protect us all in our senior years. We could do so much more and we must do so much more for all Canadians.

Today only 38.5% of Canadian workers have workplace pensions and nearly one-third have no retirement savings at all. More than 3.5 million Canadians are not saving enough in RRSPs for what used to be called their golden years, and 75% of workers are not even participating in a registered pension plan. Clearly, the notion that retirement savings can be adequately accounted for through purchases of RRSPs does not work, and urgent government action is needed.

As a complement to today's motion, I am in the process of tabling other bills designed to promote transparency and responsible investment practices in the management of public related pension fund assets. My private member's bill, Bill C-361, would enhance public disclosure rules and severely curtail the ways in which the assets of public sector pension funds can be invested, with an eye to all but eliminating a fund manager's ability to invest in risky financial instruments.

Another bill I have drafted does the same for the remainder of the federally regulated pension funds. These are the public sector pension funds. I also have been drafting a bill to require federally regulated pension funds to over-fund themselves by 20%. We could think of it as a rainy day fund, so that in the better times we prepare for the downturns that will come eventually. The bill would also amend the Income Tax Act to permit the deductibility of contributions or an excess surplus of, for example, up to 30% of ongoing corporate liabilities.

The last bill I am preparing would amend the Income Tax Act to provide substantial tax incentives to employers who wish to create a defined benefit pension plan for their employees.

• (1025)

The next issue I would like to speak about is that Canada needs a pension benefits guarantee fund. There is a need for this. Federal leadership is urgently required to set about working with the provinces to develop a pension insurance regime to ensure workers actually receive the retirement benefits they have earned, even if their employer goes out of business. We insure our cars and homes and we have deposit insurance for our savings, so why not insure our pensions?

Such an insurance system could be comparable to what exists through the Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation for bank deposits, RRSPs and tax-free savings accounts. The system could be funded by contributions from federal workplace pension plan sponsors administered by the federal government and designed to ensure efficiency and fairness to all parties.

Another notable model worth studying is the American Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation. Like the Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation, the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation is not financed through general tax revenues but through the following measures: insurance premiums paid by the sponsors of the defined benefit plans; assets from the pension plans it takes over; recoveries of unfunded pension liabilities from plan sponsors' bankruptcy estates; and investment income.

Canada may choose not to follow the American model but could create some form of pension insurance uniquely its own or a hybrid of other plans, like schemes from Switzerland, Sweden, Germany or Japan. The Netherlands has chosen to directly guarantee its pension plans with strict investment regulations and requiring that the pensions are fully funded at all times.

A recent OECD working paper put the matter succinctly when stating "no scheme to provide pension insurance can work without adequate funding rules".

The OECD document stated:

Strict funding and investment rules should be seen as complements to any pension guarantee scheme.

Business of Supply

Good funding rules can achieve almost all of what a guarantee scheme is striving for, are arguably easier to design and manage and, especially when combined with other measures.... If a guarantee scheme is successfully combined with funding rules or other protection measures it can effectively perform its task as a 'last resort' benefit protection measure.

Another clause in the motion calls for “ensuring that workers' pension funds go to the front of the line of creditors in the event of bankruptcy proceedings”.

Ken Georgetti of the Canadian Labour Congress recently stated before the finance committee:

Critically, for the sake of genuine fairness, we need to ensure that the full value of workers' pensions is protected in bankruptcy proceedings. If Canadians shouldn't be in the front of the line when it comes to protecting them, who should be?

I would take a moment to remind the House that if the current government were to only enact certain clauses of a bill that is already the law of this land, the clause would be unnecessary. The Wage Earner Protection Program Act, which enacts changes to the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act, was given royal assent in December 2007. The purpose of that act is to ensure that workers' pension funds go to the front of the line of creditors in the event of bankruptcy proceedings. The Wage Earner Protection Program Act sets out provisions to ensure that unpaid wages in the event of bankruptcy are paid to workers and sets up super-creditor status for the unpaid pension contributions.

Elements of the amendments to the above pieces of legislation were enacted by the governor-in-council in the summer of 2008. However, not all aspects of the changes were implemented, leaving some glaring loopholes.

The NDP leader, the member for Toronto—Danforth, has raised this on occasion in the House. He stated:

Mr. Speaker, the truth is that the government will not act even when it is the law.

In December 2007, Parliament took action to protect Canadian pensions by adopting Bill C-12 to amend bankruptcy laws. Section 39(2) prioritizes unpaid pension contributions in the case of bankruptcy. Sections 44 and 131 ensures that the court cannot unilaterally overturn a collective agreement. Section 126 prohibits a court from sanctioning restructuring plans unless all unpaid wage claims and pension obligations have been met. It is the law but the government has refused to put it into force. Why?

As I was considering my remarks for today, it was during that time that we were marking the 65th anniversary of D-Day, the Normandy invasion. We as a grateful nation marked that occasion as we should to show our veterans, their families and the following generations the importance of the sacrifice that generation made for us all. Successive Canadian governments claim to support the generation of sacrifice that we honoured this past week, but this year we heard stories of veterans who are now living in poverty and living in the streets. That is not acceptable for the veterans of Canada, nor any senior in Canada.

•(1030)

This Parliament must find a way to build up and fortify OAS, CPP and GIS so that they better serve the needs of those for whom they were designed. Today's NDP motion is intended to start, in a very public way, a national discussion on the future of our retirement security system. Whether it is CPP, OAS, GIS or private pensions, Canadians know these plans must be looked into to ensure that they are available for them when they retire.

Canadians need to know there will be a level of pension income for their retirement to ensure that they will spend their final years in financial security and with the dignity they deserve.

Before I am even asked, I would like to address the issue of cost. Will this motion not require billions of dollars of taxpayers' money to implement? My response is this: How expensive will inaction be?

The government is already indirectly bailing out pension plans, not to mention that it will soon have to do something for all of those people who have no pension plans. Seventy-five per cent of private sector workers who are not participating in a registered pension plan today have not been able to save for their retirement. Today 3.5 million Canadians are not saving enough in RRSPs. This situation, if unaddressed, will cost taxpayers heavily in the years to come. I would suggest the price of inaction is simply not an acceptable option.

The Conservative government can choose to continue to respond to the developing crisis in a piecemeal ad hoc fashion, or together we can devise a comprehensive long-term strategy that will put Canadian seniors on a more solid fiscal footing.

Over time, with adequate pension funding rules in place, the cost of the guarantee fund would actually be negligible as it would not be needed as pensions would be adequately funded. In the near and interim period it will be potentially expensive, yet failure to act will also cost both in terms of dollars and in terms of lives. There is no escaping the fact the government will have to come up with massive amounts of money one way or the other.

I remind members that CPP and QPP are self-financing. It then becomes a question of whether Canadians are prepared to pay more for security in their senior years and to do so as part of a secure public plan. Canadians certainly face insecurity today in the context where private options, such as RRSPs or defined contribution plans, leave Canadians uncovered and victimized by the market, that is, if they are those who can afford to contribute in the first place. Quite simply OAS and GIS are for those who cannot afford to contribute to the CPP, and that is where the cost may lie.

We accept the fact that as a result of increasing the benefits and increasing eligibility to include currently excluded groups the cost will rise. However, as I said earlier, in an age when the government is spending more than \$100 billion to relieve banks of mortgages, that does not seem like much to relieve our deserving senior citizens.

We would also suggest a beefed up CPP is the cheapest way for working Canadians to pool risks, take the burden off individuals and secure their senior years.

Regarding private plan insurance, the proposal in the motion is defined as self-financing. It would require a small increment on top of the contributions to cover insurance premiums. Once we have brought them into the plan, they would remain fully financed by employers and employees but would have the security of CPP.

Business of Supply

Never again should Canada's seniors feel invisible to their government. We can take our valued retirement income support system and make it better. Today's seniors have worked hard all of their lives and in my view they have already lived through far too much turmoil and grief.

The worldwide economic crisis has certainly made it clear that it is critical for this Parliament and for the government to adopt a coordinated national plan of action to protect seniors. This is the NDP's call to this Parliament to rise to the occasion of a great national need. Let us roll up our sleeves and come together as Canadians and do the work necessary to confront this critical need.

Here today I say to the opposition parties, to the Prime Minister and to the government, the NDP is here to work for the benefit of all Canadians, especially seniors. Join us. This is the time and place to enhance Stanley Knowles' dream of sustaining and maintaining the dignity of all Canadians in their old age.

•(1035)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. We will have to move on to questions and comments.

The hon. member for York West.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have an opportunity to raise this issue and to ask my colleague some questions on the solutions he thinks we need.

When we talk about protecting pensions, in 2005, the Liberal government put forward \$100 million for a pension protection system, which his party voted against. One thing that concerns me greatly is the number of individuals who are counting on having a fairly secure pension plan and who may now be losing that as a result of the downturn in the economy and the stock market.

What would he suggest needs to be done in order to help remedy that problem?

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, as I said in the beginning of my remarks, we should be infusing funds into the CPP and OAS to raise the amounts of the benefits payable.

If the government of the day were to cancel \$1 billion of that \$14 billion a year in tax breaks it is giving to corporations, that money could be infused into the public plans—

Mr. James Lunney: Raise taxes for GM and Chrysler?

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, I am saying cancel those tax breaks that have not been rolled out yet, that have not impacted on companies, and use that money to invest in seniors.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. Imagine the president and vice-presidents all giving themselves bonuses. The president got a \$2 million bonus while the CPP was \$24 billion in the hole.

The Minister of Finance asks if we really want the government to interfere in the private affairs of the Canada Pension Plan. The government speaks of an arm's length relationship. Do we want it to dictate the president's salary? Do we really want to see the government interfering in CPP salaries?

Was the government not interfering in the GM employees' affairs when it told them their wages had not been cut enough, and that if they wanted to get some funds from the government for restructuring, they should make them even lower?

It has interfered in the business of ordinary workers. But when it comes to interfering in the affairs of important people like the president and vice-presidents of the Canada Pension Plan—which exists in order to help workers and retired people—the government is fine with these VIPs giving themselves bonuses in the millions of dollars, while the CPP is sinking instead of making profits.

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that when the credit card rates were going up, the finance minister said he would talk to the banks.

He should be talking to this group. He should be saying that if they have any self-respect at all they will repay the bonuses. We should not have to legislate that. This is a matter of self-respect.

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I feel compelled to respond to the hon. member's response to a previous question about the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board management.

Just a few days ago in the House, the finance minister explained that the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board is arm's length from both provincial and federal governments by an act of Parliament.

If we respect parliamentary process, we respect the rules of Parliament. We do not want political interference in the remuneration of this board. The finance minister has written to those respected individuals, who have actually done a very good job as compared to other investment pension plans. They have done a very good job. They had a tough year, just like everyone did in investments.

The minister did what he could, without political interference, and suggested that these individuals abide by the agreement of the G20 on corporate remuneration.

•(1040)

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, I am thrilled to hear that the government has a new respect for the acts that are passed in this Parliament. Perhaps all of a sudden it now want us to implement the wage earner protection act.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the pieces that the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek underlined was this ridiculous compensation which, as we just heard, the parliamentary secretary seems to bless.

It is interesting. Yesterday, the front page of *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Wall Street Journal* is not known to be over on the left in terms of its writings, talked about what is being done in the United States. Do members know what the Americans are doing? They are going after bonuses, not only within the reach of government, but they are going after corporations that are paying bonuses.

Business of Supply

Does the member think our country is less able to go after compensation and bonuses than the United States? Does he think that the Conservatives are so impotent—maybe they need some political Viagra, I do not know—that they cannot get it together to actually go after bonuses at the CPP, which after all is appointed by government? Does he think they cannot do it? Does he think that they are just incapable? Do we actually have a government over there?

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the capacity of the government to go after people, it could certainly go after auto workers. I am sure it could do the same in this case.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, as a former miner, I have received bonuses in the past. I worked for Noranda, in its Brunswick mine, and everything was performance-based. When the company did not make a profit, it was not performing well, so there were no bonuses.

[*English*]

We never had any bonuses when we worked at the mine and the company was not making money. When the company was in a deficit and we were not making money, we were not getting paid bonuses.

I am trying to understand how it is that the CEOs of the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board were paid bonuses. As I said a little while ago, the government told the workers at GM that if they did not bring down their wages, they would not get a cent from the government. How is it that the government said to the CEOs, that for them it was okay?

They were told in the United States, “If you want money, come to see us, but leave your jets at home. If you want money for your corporation, it is the same thing, bring your wages down”.

Here is an organization that is arm's length to the government, but it is appointed by the government that represents the workers of this country to ensure there is a pension for workers when they retire, and the government says, “No, no, you can be paid millions of dollars of bonuses even if you lose \$24 billion”.

I would like to know if the member can understand why the government is staying silent or why it is protecting those CEOs who are stealing \$12 million from the pension plan.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, in my remarks I spoke to the fact that there is an attitude in the corporate community that they top up their salaries with performance bonuses, retention bonuses and whatnot. It is almost like a disease. It spread through the United States, and we saw what happened with the collapse down there. To some extent maybe it has permeated to the Conservative side of this House, because the Conservatives seem to accept this as a fact.

I agree with the member that this is workers' money. The government should be defending that and demanding the repayment of those bonuses.

•(1045)

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the hon. member would recognize that in today's corporate world the bonus or compensation structure is very much set up, not for one

year but for an average rolling out. Corporations and companies look at the long-term vision and not just a one-year return.

I wonder if the hon. member would have a comment on that or the theory of that in general.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, I would rather be more specific. In the case of CPP, the losses of one year wipe out all the contributions of the last four. They do not deserve a bonus.

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the House for the opportunity to comment on the motion before us today.

This government stands with hard-working Canadians who want to be able to count on their pension plans for a stable retirement.

We realize that Canadians, particularly seniors, are worried about their pensions. The current financial market turmoil and uncertainty is a concern for all of us, including older Canadians who have worked hard and saved diligently for their retirement years and rely on their pensions and savings.

Contrary to what the hon. member may be suggesting, we have acted, and acted early, to help protect all Canadians from the financial crisis battering our shores, a financial crisis that I might remind my friend did not originate in Canada but is impacting Canadians through no fault of anything we have done in this country. It is a crisis that major financial organizations agree Canada is handling exceptionally well because of our strong domestic fiscal policies.

Both the IMF and the OECD project that Canada will first of all experience the smallest contraction in the G7 for 2009, and as well, it will have the strongest recovery in the G7 for 2010.

A recent IMF report stated:

Canada is better positioned than many countries to weather the crisis. It has taken proactive steps to stimulate demand, ward off deflation, and enhance the toolkit for dealing with worsening financial strains if they emerge. Thanks to these factors, the strains evident in other countries, especially in the financial sector, are markedly less serious in Canada.

Even OECD Secretary General Angel Gurría declared,

Effectively, Canada will be one of the first to come out of the recession.

How is our country acting to protect the pensions of Canadians? In the November 2008 economic and fiscal statement, our government provided temporary solvency relief to federally regulated private pension plans that have been affected by the substantial declines in equity markets.

In January, our government released a consultation document seeking views from Canadians on the legislative and regulatory framework for federally regulated private pension plans.

Business of Supply

The finance minister asked me to lead these consultations. This gave me the opportunity to listen to Canadians across Canada, to hear their views on how we can strengthen the security of pension plan benefits as well as ensure that the framework is balanced and appropriate. The hearings were open to anybody who wanted to voice their concerns. I am also working with provincial and territorial governments as an important part of this consultation process.

This consultation process follows on the heels of comprehensive provincial pension reviews completed by Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario in late 2008, as well as Nova Scotia in January 2009.

In early March, the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions, known as OSFI, released additional guidance on the use of smoothing and asset valuations for federally regulated plans. The government is assisting OSFI in providing flexibility to supplement the temporary solvency funding relief proposed in the November 2008 economic and fiscal statement. OSFI continues to monitor the funding situation of plans carefully and is taking steps wherever necessary to protect the rights and interests of plan beneficiaries.

In May, federal, provincial and territorial ministers of finance announced the result of the Canada pension plan's triennial review, which confirmed that Canada's retirement system remains sound at the current contribution rate of 9.9% and that it has been weathering the financial turbulence well.

The ministers also recommended a number of changes to CPP to better reflect the way Canadians work, live and retire. The changes would improve flexibility for older workers to combine work and pension, enhance CPP coverage as well as improve equity in the plan's flexible retirement provisions. If approved, the changes will be introduced in 2011 and phased in gradually.

The Canada pension plan remains one of the most successful pension plans in the world. Through the CPP, the government provides a secure, indexed lifelong benefit of up to \$909 per month. We are not only maintaining the quality of life for seniors, but improving it during these difficult economic times.

• (1050)

At this same meeting of finance ministers, there was consensus for the federal government to work with our provincial and territorial counterparts to launch a research working group on pensions. This group will be examining the adequacy of retirement income of Canadians and is slated to report its findings back to the first finance ministers before the end of this year. More details will be forthcoming on this group in the near future, and I look forward very much to being part of this.

This government believes in preserving a strong pension system in this country. At the same time, Canada's economic action plan is stimulating the economy while protecting Canadians hit hardest by the global recession. Ensuring the retirement income security of Canadians is an important goal of the Government of Canada, but it also means leaving more money in the pockets of seniors. The economic action plan added over \$300 million to the \$1.6 billion in targeted tax relief that the government is already providing to seniors for the 2009 tax year.

We increased the age credit amount by \$1,000 for 2009 and the subsequent taxation years. This increase will provide \$325 million in tax savings to about 2.2 million low- and middle-income seniors in 2009 and 2010. With the \$1,000 increase, the age credit amount for 2009 will be \$6,408, translating into tax relief of up to \$961 for an eligible senior. The \$1,000 increase in the age credit amount starting in 2009 will reduce taxes for taxpaying seniors with incomes under the \$75,000 mark.

In addition, the 25% reduction in required minimum withdrawals from registered retirement income funds, or RRIFs, announced in the 2008 economic and fiscal statement, provided \$200 million in tax assistance to RRIF holders in 2008 by allowing retirees to keep more of their savings in their RRIFs.

The increase in the age credit amount builds on the significant tax relief provided since 2006 for seniors and pensioners, including doubling the amount of pension income credit from \$1,000 to \$2,000, a \$1,000 increase in the age credit in 2006, the introduction of pension income splitting for 2007, and the increase in the age limit for maturing pensions and RRSPs from 69 to 71 in 2007. Together these measures provide about \$1.9 billion annually in tax relief to seniors and pensioners.

In addition, the new tax free savings account provides a general purpose means for seniors to meet their ongoing savings needs on a tax-preferred basis. Of note, the income earned within a TFSA and withdrawals from the account will not affect eligibility for federal income-tested benefits or credits, such as the old age security or the guaranteed income supplement, or the goods and services tax credit.

Seniors also benefit from general personal tax cuts, such as reducing the lowest personal income tax rate from 16% to 15%, increases to basic personal amounts and rate thresholds, and the two-point reduction in the GST.

Promoting the retirement income security of Canadians is an important goal of the Government of Canada. We will continue to ensure that our policies, programs and services meet the evolving needs of Canada's senior population.

We recognize the contributions seniors have made and continue to make to our nation. That is why we have taken measures to ensure the old age security program and the guaranteed income supplement continue to meet the needs of seniors. The GIS is an important resource for low-income seniors. It helps to ensure that every pensioner has enough income from all sources, including the OAS, to maintain and improve the standard of living of Canada's seniors.

OAS is one of the most critical programs in our social safety net. It is important for all Canadians, those who are seniors now and Canadians who will be seniors in the future. It is the responsibility of the government to manage these programs so they will continue to exist in the future.

•(1055)

I know that the hon. member, like every member in the House, cares deeply about seniors and seniors issues, especially the challenges faced by seniors living in low-income situations. Providing additional assistance to older workers and to seniors wishing to re-enter the workforce is a worthy goal, especially given the labour shortages that exist in so many sectors where seniors are likely to take a part-time job.

We also understand that older workers and vulnerable communities face their own challenges in finding employment. This is why Canada's economic action plan provided an additional \$90 million over three years to extend the targeted initiative for older workers until March 2012. The government has expanded the scope of the program to include vulnerable cities with populations of less than 250,000, making assistance available to more older workers in a larger number of cities, particularly those heavily dependent upon a single sector or a single employer.

These changes will expand the number of eligible communities and ensure that older workers across the country have the support they need to adapt to a changing economy. Canadians are concerned about the long-term viability of their pension plans. We are listening to their views on how we can strengthen the security of pension plan benefits and ensure that the framework is balanced and appropriate.

In April, the G20 agreed with principles on executive compensation set out by the Financial Stability Board. Based on these recommendations, the Minister of Finance asked all government-owned companies, including the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board, to review their compensation packages. They are to report back as to whether they are meeting the forum's principles and to confirm steps that they will take, if necessary, to become compliant.

I am sure the hon. member is aware that public companies in Canada are already subject to detailed executive compensation disclosure requirements prescribed by provincial securities law. Let me assure the hon. member that both private and public companies are well aware of the current public views with respect to excessive compensation. For example, the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board did not award any bonuses for the individual performance component of the short-term bonus for 2008-09, and base salaries are to remain unchanged for 2009-10.

Under the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board's multiple-year approach, the negative performance of 2008-09 affected bonuses for this year and will negatively affect performance pay for the next three years. No bonuses are paid to directors on the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board.

I would like to point out for my hon. colleague that the poverty rate among seniors has declined dramatically over the past 25 years and the average income for seniors in that time has increased. In fact, Canada already has one of the lowest levels of poverty among seniors of any country in the industrialized world.

Our record shows that our government is committed to the financial well-being of Canadian seniors, especially those with low income. In the past two and half years, we have done more for seniors than any government before us. We have made it easier for seniors to apply for Canada pension and OAS benefits. We have

Points of Order

reduced combined income tax by allowing senior couples to split their pension income. We have reduced the GST twice, which is often the only tax that low-income seniors pay. We have created the National Seniors Council to advise the government on matters related to seniors' well-being and quality of life.

We have committed resources to combat elder abuse, through public awareness and education, as well as upgrading community buildings and equipment used by seniors. We have also contributed yearly funding to the new horizons for seniors program to encourage seniors to contribute to their communities. Since taking office, our government has acted decisively on its commitment to protect the security of Canadian seniors.

This government cares deeply about the many contributions that today's seniors have made and continue to make to our society. These seniors raised families. They helped us build our national economy, and they made vital contributions to our health, safety, education and culture. Furthermore, many Canadian seniors are veterans who risked their lives to preserve our freedom.

•(1100)

For these reasons and many more, our government will continue to do its utmost to ensure that Canadian seniors are treated with dignity. We will ensure that they receive the full respect they deserve. We are helping seniors and will continue to help them.

We are absolutely on the right track. The World Bank president, Robert Zoellick, during his recent visit to Canada, reaffirmed this view, saying that, by global standards, Canada is in an enviable position. He said:

I think a lot of people would like to change places with Canada.

* * *

[*Translation*]

POINTS OF ORDER

TABLING OF REPORTS

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order that is particularly important at this very moment. It relates to a ruling handed down here in Parliament on February 3, 2009.

The budget was passed:

—on condition that the Government table reports in Parliament no later than five sitting days before the last allotted day in each of the supply periods ending March 26, 2009, June 23, 2009—

The verb tense is important:

a) to provide...updates—

So that must be tabled here. The government must provide an update and detail the implementation here, not somewhere else.

Points of Order

Mr. Speaker, as I stand and address the House at this very moment, the Minister of Finance is somewhere far from here giving a report, not to this House, but to a representative from the other place, Senator Duffy. I ask you, on behalf of all parliamentarians, what will you do to protect our rights as parliamentarians and elected members of this House, right here today?

This government is demonstrating all too clearly its total disregard for this parliamentary institution. It is renegeing on a formal promise it made. The minister's press conference began a few minutes ago, but we are still waiting to hear from the government, which is renegeing on its promise to report to this House, and providing an update, not tabling a document. The verb tense is very important.

It must come and explain itself here in this House. It should not be holding a cooked-up press conference with a journalist-turned-senator who will ask the minister all the right questions. This is absolutely outrageous.

Mr. Speaker, I ask you to defend the rights of all parliamentarians and give a ruling that forces the government to respect this House's decision regarding the budget.

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his intervention. He is correct that the report is to be tabled in the House, and it will be.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, it is outrageous to hear the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance say that it is to be tabled and that it will be. The minister's press conference has already started. It is the members of Parliament who should be receiving this report, according to the decision of this House, which adopted the budget in February of this year.

This is unacceptable and I ask you to immediately take action to protect the rights of all parliamentarians in this regard.

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member might want to go out and check the TV. I do not believe an actual press conference has begun.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): On the same point, Mr. Speaker, my colleague from the NDP has been very clear. It was supposed to be tabled in the House, and if the points he is making are accurate, then I think we should be suspending the House until this issue is corrected.

It again shows disrespect for this House. I am not concerned with that House; this is the one that I am in. The agreement is that the report was to be tabled in this House.

I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, to look into that issue right away, and if necessary, suspend the House until this issue is dealt with.

•(1105)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are constantly wondering what the

Conservatives will do to avoid respecting this House and this place. Today, we have another example.

The Bloc Québécois joins its Liberal and NDP colleagues in asking that the government table and present its statement immediately in this House.

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, to follow up on this point of order, if that is what it is, the Prime Minister is speaking at this time. He is not tabling the report. The report will be tabled in the House momentarily.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, how can we expect anything other than that type of subterfuge from the government? Nothing could have been clearer in the document that was adopted here in February of this year. It was a condition of the adoption of the budget, the most important thing that is done by the elected members of the House.

The French is very clear.

[*Translation*]

It states: "À condition que le gouvernement dépose des rapports au Parlement—"

[*English*]

On condition that the government makes its report here, the verb tense used in the French makes it eminently clear that it is not a question of sending a document to the table, which has not even been done.

The government is calling a press conference hundreds of kilometres from here. There is a rose bonbon interview to be given by Senator Mike Duffy of the Prime Minister, instead of respecting the prerogatives, the integrity, the rights of the members duly elected in the House. He has gone to the other place, taken someone who has never been elected to anything in his life, except to be elected by his Prime Minister to give him a loving interview so he can say how good things are going. The very fact that government members have done that hundreds of kilometres away from here is proof of the fact that this, for them, is another opportunity to try to control the message, instead of respecting the House of Commons.

We find it an outrage that the government would choose to set itself up, hundreds of kilometres away from the House, have an interview with a chosen senator, who is a former journalist, to give prepared questions and answers to the Prime Minister, instead of respecting the clear will of the House, expressed February 3, as precondition to the adoption of the budget that it make reports in the House.

The holding of the press conference now is total contempt for the House of Commons and for the millions of Canadians who voted to put us here to do the job we have been elected to do.

The Deputy Speaker: I will take a few more interventions on this subject. I will go first to the parliamentary secretary and then after that to the member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

Business of Supply

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure how I can be any more clear than I was. The report to Parliament, which is due to be tabled in the House today, will be reported today.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the remarks of my NDP colleague are important. You should consider that this may constitute contempt of Parliament and I humbly refer to you this serious charge. I believe that here may be contempt of Parliament and, if that is the case, it obviously has an impact on all members of this House throughout Quebec and all of Canada.

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the members for their interventions.

I think the best course of action now is we have assurance from the parliamentary secretary that the report will be tabled imminently. We can wait for that and see what is in it. Then if members have points to make, the Chair will take the interventions that were raised under advisement and review the situation once the report is tabled and if necessary come back to the House.

* * *

●(1110)

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—PENSIONS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, going back to our other debate, I recognize the parliamentary secretary has been touring the country and has been listening to some folks on the issue of pensions. I would argue that perhaps from the perspective of some of the seniors, the consultation was not broad enough.

In my remarks, I said that we must come together on this issue. I am certainly prepared to put aside the partisanship, and on some days it is a little more difficult than others, to speak to it.

When we consider that some seniors no longer have a partner, and perhaps have never worked and do not qualify for CPP, and are trying to exist on about \$1,000 a month, we have to do something for those people in an immediate way. Even those who have worked and do not have the full value of CPP and are in the area of \$1,200 or \$1,400 a month, if they are lucky, are really having a hard time getting by. It is very troubling.

I have a question for the parliamentary secretary. Recently on income splitting, there are sometimes situations where the income has been split and then one partner passes away. We are hearing that people are having trouble getting the income they split back. Could he respond to that?

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his passion on this issue. As I said in my remarks, it is very important that we respect our seniors because of the incredible contribution they have made to our country. We put pension splitting for seniors in place, at the request of seniors, in our prebudget consultations two years ago. We heard a resounding request for that.

It is probably not perfect, but it was a position that was asked for by seniors, a position that we could take and move forward. I would argue that this is exactly what we are doing.

I heard loud and clear from every part of the country. I repeat, we had public sessions open to all seniors who wanted to come and share their concerns with us. To be fair, we were trying to hear about what was our jurisdiction federally, the federally regulated private pension plans.

I need to share with all hon. members the concern that other seniors raised outside of that parameter. They shared that with their provincial ministers as well. Not all finance ministers in the provinces are responsible for pension regulation, so we have a bit of a challenge with that. When the finance ministers get together, not all of them are responsible for pensions.

At the federal-provincial-territorial finance ministers meeting, pensions was probably the most discussed issue around the table. That is why we are coming forward with a research working group to address the adequacy of retirement income in Canada.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been impatiently waiting for the report to which the parliamentary secretary has referred. He has been touring the country for the last several months. It was announced that he would immediately tour the country and come forward a report. Recently he moved for an extension.

First, do I understand from his comments that his research working group is not prepared to respond today on what recommendations it would make to the minister on the changes needed?

The second question is on the issue of unfunded liabilities. A lot of our major companies are asking for that to be moved from five years to ten years. I would be interested to know what his comments are on that.

The Canada pension plan was overhauled by the Liberal government and put on a very secure funding program. We are all very proud of that program. It has been a major boost to the low income seniors. Knowing that the Prime Minister was previously supportive of abolishing the CPP and replacing it with a super RRSP as a mandatory savings program, I continue to have concerns, given the future challenges we will face, that the Prime Minister might still be of that same mind to abolish the CPP.

●(1115)

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, my colleague has on several occasions approached me personally to express her concerns about pension adequacy. The hon. member is concerned, as we all are in the House.

In reference to her question about the consultation process, we have said at this point that any changes we deem necessary to strengthen federally-regulated private pension plans will be put forward in legislative changes next fall. The website that was receiving input was finalized as of May 31, so we are still doing our analysis.

We heard about extending solvency. Perhaps I can address that on an individual basis with the hon. member.

Business of Supply

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will follow up on a line of questioning that took place earlier today.

A few of my constituents have expressed concerns about the bonus structure of the CPP. Overwhelmingly the more prominent concern is about stability of the pensions. My constituents have been expressing a concern in terms of the performance of the Canada pension plan. I would like a bit of clarification.

A global economic crisis is going on. Obviously the stock markets have taken a very significant hit, particularly earlier in the year. Could the member comment on the relative performance of the CPP compared to the overall performance of the stock markets in general?

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, I am very glad to get that question. We do not want seniors who are listening to this debate today to start worrying about the Canada pension plan. It is one of the soundest plans in the world.

The triennial review, which was completed and discussed at the federal-provincial-territorial finance ministers meeting, confirmed that once again. As I said earlier, this is arm's-length from government so there is no political interference at all, either provincially or federally. A joint jurisdiction reviews this. We want that to be very clear.

It is sound. Individuals make investment recommendations on what is a very large fund. That fund did relatively well compared to many of our own RRSPs. There are many examples around the world that did not do so well.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first, did the member's group look at the Saskatchewan pension plan, which has been in place now for a number of years? Second, can he assure the House that the government is not looking at any type of privatization of the Canadian pension system.

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, as I said, part of the consultation was to deal with federally-regulated private pension plans. However, the group met with each province that had done some innovative things with their pension plans.

The member referred to Saskatchewan and absolutely it has moved forward, as has Quebec. Alberta and British Columbia tabled a report that was very informative, as did Nova Scotia and Ontario. That is why the research group decided to focus on overall retirement income adequacy, to ensure that retirement incomes for Canadians would be adequate going forward. As I say, there are some good examples in Saskatchewan. We are working with the provinces on this. That is very important.

The thing we need to remember in all of this debate today is that we are trading on provincial jurisdiction. The federal government only regulates 7% of private pension plans. We need to ensure that what we deal with today is federal jurisdiction and not impose any suggestions of what the provinces should do on their own.

• (1120)

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to join in this debate. I thank my colleague from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek for putting forward this opposition motion. Today's motion gives us a chance to talk about the pension

issues that many Canadians are talking about, and to talk about what else we could possibly do to improve the quality of life for seniors throughout Canada.

Many seniors are struggling because they are in a low income bracket. Others are struggling because of the income trust issue, the requirements on their RRIFs and the downturn in the stock market. Many seniors look to government to show leadership and sensitivity to the issue.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak today, especially in my capacity as the official opposition critic for veterans affairs, seniors and pensions. We will have a chance to talk about many of those issues today.

I was in Normandy, France last week, along with several of my colleagues, for the D-Day anniversary on June 6. We had a chance to spend quite a bit of time with several of our veterans and to talk about many issues, not only issues specific to veterans and seniors, but issues important to the country as a whole.

They made it clear to me that they want to make sure that Canada remains on a solid footing and that we continue to be a compassionate, caring country. Our veterans fought for that. They are relying on all of us as parliamentarians to ensure that work is done. They added to my and my colleagues' feeling of responsibility.

Our veterans want us as parliamentarians to be their voice, to be responsible, to be reasonable, and to do a good job for them. I can certainly say to all of them and to my constituents in York West that I take my responsibility seriously and I will continue to do the best I can. I am sure my colleagues will do the same.

We have an opportunity today to focus on the issues concerning veterans and seniors. We need to make sure we are protecting their dignity. We need to ensure that we provide a good quality of life for them.

The NDP motion that is before us today states:

That, in the opinion of the House, in light of the legitimate concerns of Canadians that pensions and their retirement security may not be there for them in their retirement years, the Government of Canada should begin to work with the provinces and territories to ensure the sustainability of Canadians' retirement incomes by bringing forward at the earliest opportunity, measures such as:

- (a) expanding and increasing the CPP/QPP, OAS and GIS to ensure all Canadians can count on a dignified retirement;
- (b) establishing a self-financing pension insurance program to ensure the viability of workplace sponsored plans in tough economic times;
- (c) ensuring that workers' pension funds go to the front of the line of creditors in the event of bankruptcy proceedings;
- (d) in the interest of appropriate management of the CPP that the Government of Canada immediately protect the CPP from imprudent investment practices by ceasing the practice of awarding managers performance-based bonuses; and
- (e) take all necessary steps to recover those bonuses for 2009, ensuring managers in the future are paid appropriate industry-competitive salaries.

Business of Supply

That is quite a list. Some of those items are easier to support than others. Some of them raise other questions about our responsibilities, especially with arm's length operations. I will try to touch on some of the issues within my time limit.

Seniors are active members of our society and we want them to stay as such. Our last Liberal budget made significant investments in seniors programs, from health care to income security, from retirement savings to assistance for their caregivers. Once we had financial stability back, we did more for seniors in that period of time than any other government had done. I appreciate that governments continue to do more. This is not about who has done the most, but about how we can continue to improve the quality of life for seniors in our country.

Our constant goal has to be the enhancement of the quality of life for all seniors. We must remember that the country was built by today's seniors.

• (1125)

As members will know, the guaranteed income supplement provides low income seniors with a benefit that ensures a basic level of income throughout their retirement years.

In 2004 our Liberal government, under the great leadership of the former prime minister and a great minister of state for families and caregivers, made a commitment, along with the rest of our colleagues, to increase the guaranteed income supplement by \$1.5 billion over five years. However, our budget went above and beyond that commitment. We also proposed to increase the guaranteed income supplement benefits for low income seniors, not by the \$1.5 billion but by \$2.7 billion over two years. That would have made a significant difference in the ability of many of our low income seniors to have a bit of extra money to enjoy a few extra niceties in life, a bit of a vacation or a dinner out. Many of our seniors do not have the extra funds to do that. It was our intent to have the maximum guaranteed income supplement increased by more than \$400 per year for a single senior and by almost \$700 for a couple.

I have to mention also that we know many of the people who continue to live below the poverty line are women. Women who stay at home to raise their children do not contribute to CPP and are penalized because of that. In spite of the fact that we have a GIS program, we need to find a way to allow women or men who prefer to stay in the household and raise their families some ability to contribute. Some sort of a pension program is needed so that they do not end up in poverty at 65 years of age.

Recently I have heard some excellent suggestions for future improvements to the Canada pension plan, such as increasing the current 60% CPP survivor pension. I often hear from widows who come into my office that the bills are the same as they were when their husbands were alive, but suddenly, when the husband dies, the pension is reduced immediately.

Could we not extend that by several months, giving the survivor, usually a widow, time to adjust to being alone and finding the ability to carry things financially? All of the expenses for a house are the same, and yet all of a sudden, within a week of the death of the spouse, that pension is reduced very quickly and the surviving spouse has to figure out how to manage that. It is a huge problem

and one on which I would like to see us do some work. Could we manage to give the surviving pensioner a couple of months to adjust to suddenly being on a single income rather than a dual income?

Maybe we could increase the income replacement rate for the Canada pension, which currently is only 25% of allowable income. Canada needs to have a big discussion on what we need to do when it comes to pensions and increasing the amount of savings toward our pension system.

The former Liberal government, specifically the finance minister of the day, Paul Martin, acted in 1997 to make sure that the Canada pension plan would be affordable for future generations, and also, very importantly, could be sustained in the face of an aging population, increasing longevity and the retirement of the baby boom generation. It was clearly foreseen by Mr. Martin that that was going to put a huge strain on our retirement system and changes were made at that time. Given the economic situation we are in, we need to look now at the next 50 years and what kind of changes also need to be made.

He also introduced proposals to significantly alter the Canada pension plan on February 14, 1997, just days prior to the release of his 1997 federal budget. Stakeholders all across the country agreed that these tough changes were in the country's best interest to ensure a socially secure and fairly compensated work force in the years to come. Thank goodness that work was done at that particular point.

The economic crisis though means that Canadians continue to be worried about their pensions, and rightfully so. We have all heard stories of Canadians who are losing their pensions due to company bankruptcies. The only province in Canada that protects pensions is Ontario, and that is only to a certain value, but thank goodness that at least Ontario has that program. I would hope that other provinces would adopt a similar program.

• (1130)

I would like to hear what the Conservative government is going to do to protect Canadian pensions. We have heard some comments from the parliamentary secretary, but most of us are anxious to know what other ideas the Conservatives have and how we can work together to make sure that we are doing the best for our seniors who are looking forward to their pension days. So far, we have not heard anything concrete, other than more study. I am glad there is a website up and working today, but how long will it be before we get legislation that we can pass quickly?

The motion calls on the government to ensure that workers' pension funds go to the front of the line of creditors in the event of bankruptcy proceedings. A lot of Canadians are shocked to find out that is not currently the case, but it should be. In my capacity as critic, I have met with countless people who are finding themselves in dire situations through absolutely no fault of their own, due to the bankruptcy of their former employers. It is very unfortunate. We need to be able to protect those Canadians. I am encouraging the government to act immediately to protect the pension funds and make them priority creditors.

Business of Supply

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance is handling the pension file for the Conservatives, and continues to move it along. On January 9, 2009, the government released a consultation document seeking views from Canadians on the legislative and regulatory framework for federally regulated pension plans. As part of this process, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance will be engaging Canadians through public meetings across Canada to examine issues pertaining to defined benefits, defined contributions and other private pension plans to ensure that the framework pertaining to these pension plans is appropriate.

Given the importance of some of the issues involved, I hoped that the government would accelerate that timeline rather than delay it. However, on May 25, as the parliamentary secretary indicated earlier, he sent out an email saying that the Conservatives had made the decision to extend their consultations until May 31, 2009, which has also passed. The website is up now. In January the issue was so important they were going to move quickly, and in May it was so important that they would need more time to study it.

Something must come out of it quickly. The House will soon be rising. The parliamentary secretary has indicated that he will be bringing in legislation in the fall. I hope that would come sooner rather than later and that many of us have a chance to comment on it prior to its being introduced in the House.

Canadians continue to be worried about the security of their retirement plans, both public and private. The CPP alone has lost some \$20 billion, but it still does far better than any other program of a similar nature around the world. It continues to be held as a model in all of the G8 as the most solvent pension plan around.

Part of the motion talks about the issue of the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board and its bonuses. There has been public outrage over the \$7 million paid in bonuses to four top executives at the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board. Our House leader asked that the government request that the CPP Investment Board review its multi-million dollar bonuses in the context of the recession that is killing the jobs of 350,000 ordinary Canadians. We have yet to hear anything concrete from the government, other than the comment that has been made earlier. It would be helpful on a moral basis if the individuals receiving those bonuses stopped and thought about those 350,000 people who have no employment and that that \$7 million is actually coming out of their pension program. It would be good if they did it on a moral basis, but it is arm's length, and we all understand that.

The government does not seem to be taking any action on it. The Conservatives are very busy right now with lost binders and tape recorders, but I do hope that does not take them away from the real issues we are trying to deal with today, which are the issues of pension, pension reform and seniors, and how we can help them further in one capacity or another.

Another excellent suggestion from our House leader was that executives, such as president and CEO David Denison, voluntarily give back this year's bonus as a sign of moral leadership. I am sure we would all be very happy if he were to do that, and we would probably find a way to recognize him in the House as being a great Canadian who understands the suffering and struggling of those 350,000 unemployed Canadians, but there is no news on that yet.

●(1135)

Another big issue, especially in these difficult times, is making sure that seniors are aware of the benefits for which they are eligible. I know that most of us on this side of the House, and I imagine throughout the House, have spent a lot of time reaching out to our seniors through our newsletters and householders, making sure that people know what services we provide as MPs but most importantly, that they are eligible for pensions, CPP, OAS and so on, so that we can offer the utmost help to our seniors when they are entitled to it.

A recent Senate report also called for the undertaking of an aggressive campaign to ensure that all eligible Canadians were receiving all retirement and associated benefits. It recommended:

Inform seniors of all possible federal sources of income supports when they apply for any one of them;

The province of Quebec clearly does a very good job of reaching out to all seniors living in Quebec to make sure that they are able to get the resources that are available to them. I think that is a very important thing.

The report continued:

Make available to seniors application forms in aboriginal languages and the languages of larger immigrant populations;

We do a lot of filling out of applications in my office due to language difficulties. I have a very multicultural riding. Once we get our messages out there, ultimately, the people need to go somewhere for help. Many of them end up in my office and we are very pleased to have the opportunity to be able to assist them.

The report continued:

Make fully retroactive repayments with interest to eligible recipients who did not apply for OAS/GIS at 65 or CPP at 70, or who were denied benefits due to administrative errors.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I must interrupt the hon. member there. I see that the Minister of Finance is rising on a point of order.

* * *

[Translation]

ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to an order of the House of Commons dated February 3, 2009, I have the honour of tabling the second report on Canada's economic action plan.

* * *

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—PENSIONS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for York West has three minutes left in the time allotted for her remarks.

Business of Supply

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, I guess we can get interrupted whenever someone has to table a report. It would have been nice if that report had been tabled at 11 o'clock. We might have more members sitting in the House rather than out giving interviews on a variety of things.

In this time of economic crisis, there are other things that the government needs to do to help Canadian pensioners. As we know, seniors are forced to withdraw money from many of their investments despite the current market conditions. That seems extremely unfair. I realize that the government has given two years, but I think it would be far better to give people four years.

In two years, they are not going to make up much of the money that they lost. If the government does not want to increase direct compensation to these seniors, it would be a far better way to compensate and assist them by at least giving them four years before they have to withdraw the money from their RRIF program.

CARP, the Canadian Association for Retired Persons, is calling for a two-year moratorium on the RRIF withdrawals in order to minimize the losses of seniors during this economic crisis. It would be of significant help to many of those seniors if the government would turn around and do that. It is not going to cost the government money and it is going to help seniors live a more comfortable life.

The current drop in stock values and the fact that the amount to be withdrawn is calculated on January 1 are both very problematic. Not only are the savings depleted by the mandatory withdrawals but with the reduced value, many more units must be withdrawn to meet the minimum withdrawal requirements, and the retirement savings would be depleted at alarming rates. We are carefully considering suggestions from a variety of organizations throughout Canada, including CARP.

In closing, we will be supporting this motion, as we agree with many of its components. All of us in the House need to work together in order to protect the pensions of Canadians. Of course, the provinces and territories need to cooperate in any pension law reform. We cannot do it alone. We also need to encourage Canadians to increase their own savings for their retirement.

Unfortunately, for many of us, no one thinks about pensions until we start to get into our 40s. When we start to pay attention to it, it is far too late. Canadians need to have a major debate across this country. We need to understand that we all need to be saving for our retirement years. As soon as we start work, we should be putting money aside.

How do we, as a government, show leadership to ensure that people are protected and that they can lead a life of good quality once they retire?

• (1140)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the member, but also for the parliamentary secretary.

While we are concerned about pensions, we have movements by provincial governments, such as Saskatchewan and Manitoba that, in the past three or four years, passed legislation to allow people easier access to their pension proceeds. In addition, the federal Liberal

government made it easier to use RRSP money, as members will recall, as down payments on houses.

Both of these measures, in my view, are contrary to promotion of adequate pension funds for retirement. So, I would like to ask the member whether she agrees that the government is giving conflicting signals to the public when, on the one hand, we make it easy to withdraw pension funds to make down payments on houses and then we expect people to have adequate pensions when they retire?

My further question really had more to do with the parliamentary secretary's comments when he said that he was interested in the Saskatchewan NDP plan that is still in effect in Saskatchewan, that there were some positive benefits to it. I certainly would be more interested in knowing what the strengths of the Saskatchewan system are.

Also, I did ask him a question before, but he did not have time to answer. I wanted him to assure us that the government has no plans to privatize the Canada pension system and—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

I will have to stop the member there, to allow the hon. member for York West a chance to respond.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, I continue to be very concerned about what the government might do on the CPP file because of the previous comments from the Prime Minister, that he thought we should eliminate it and go into a super RRSP fund. Currently, only 18% of Canadians I believe contribute their maximum to RRSPs.

So, I think that RRSPs are one program, but it does go completely against that when we turn around and allow people to take the money out to put a down payment on a house. Even though I am very supportive of people being able to make a down payment, it does take away from their ability to plan for their future. I think for far too long we as Canadians have not paid attention to the whole issue of retirement. We do not think about it because when we get it, well, we get there. Well, all of a sudden, we can go from earning \$80,000 when we are 65 to an amount that is reduced to \$20,000. We are not going to go far on \$20,000. We are not going to be able to go on vacations. We are not going to be able to drive a car probably, depending on where we live.

It is the whole issue of getting Canadians to pay attention. We need to engage Canadians in the debate all across the country on pension plans and what the government can do, whether that is a supplementary Canada pension plan, or what we can be doing as governments, together with our provinces, to ensure that Canadians will have sufficient funds so that they can retire with a good quality of life.

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. friend from York West for a good speech.

Business of Supply

I sense that there is a lot of support in this House for the concerns that are being raised today. However, as I did not have time to answer the question, if I can, I would like to get it on the record that this government has no intention of privatizing the Canada pension plan. As I said earlier, it is working well.

However, we need to, and that is why we have established this research working group, find out if there is a better way, if there is some way that we can further protect those who are not protected at this point with their retirement income.

The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona raised a very valid concern. During pre-budget consultations every year, we are asked to provide another process for people to withdraw from their RRSPs to do something or other. I would like a comment from the hon. member as to how to deal with that, how do we help—

● (1145)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for York West.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, that is fascinating because I think many of us are supportive of possibly turning around and getting Canadians to invest in RRSPs at a very early age. That is a way of saving money and saving taxes. However, if they take money out, maybe the requirement should be that they have to increase the following year their repayment plan in order to put back the money into their RRSP.

However, the bigger issue is, how do we get Canadians maximizing the use of RRSPs? Only 18% maximize the use now. We need to encourage more people to put more money into those plans. Maybe we need to make it an obligation. I am not sure. No one wants to have to do those things. However, if the Liberals had not increased the contribution levels to the CPP, and I remember the screaming and hollering that went on when the Liberal government did that, people who are retiring today would not have the pension that they receive today.

We need to increase our contributions in a variety of ways, and RRSPs are just one of them.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP has long stood up for pensions and income security for seniors. Our commitment to the dignity of seniors and all Canadians stems back to the work of MP J.S. Woodsworth, who fought hard for the Old Age Pensions Act passed in 1927. Stanley Knowles, as well, played a pivotal role in establishing income support for our seniors.

In my riding I have met with many seniors at Cedar Cottage, New Chelsea Gardens and Little Mountain Manor seniors homes. They all tell me the same thing. They need more Canada pension plan, more old age security income, better prescriptions, eyeglasses and health care coverage, and better transport and home support.

Could the hon. member comment on the possibility of simply using the present Canada pension plan, which is already a national pension plan set up with all the infrastructure and administration in place? Should we be looking at raising the contribution levels of Canadians so that they can contribute to a national pension plan that is safe and secure for them, as well as increasing the old age security amounts in this country?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, I would love to be able to increase it. I am sure all members would. We could increase old age security and the GIS. Right now people are contributing 25% to the CPP. For us to do what we need to do, we would probably have to increase that with a 50% jump in Canada pension plan premiums. I think we would hear a huge outrage.

The answer, possibly, is to contribute a higher percentage. Instead of 25% today, we could start contributing 27% or 29%, so that the pages, for example, who are here today would see the benefits probably more so than anyone else if we started going in that direction of increasing contributions.

Everything comes out of one tax pot at the end of the day. It comes out of general revenues when whoever happens to be the government decides how much money we have and how much can we allocate. Giving more to our low income seniors, trying to help those who are widows or widowers to have a quality life once their partner has died, would certainly go a long way to making them more comfortable and allowing them to stay in their homes a little bit longer as well.

● (1150)

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an interesting proposal put forward with respect to raising personal contributions that would allow for an expansion of the CPP.

I understand the concern that is being raised with respect to the privatization and the erosion of the pension regime through privatization, but there is an interesting approach that has been suggested. That is to look at the large pension funds and recognize that the problem is underfunding.

Rather than going to the participants for an expansion of the CPP, it has been suggested that the large pension funds, like OMERS and teachers, be folded in with respect to a larger base to then drive a more equitable and expanded CPP.

Would the member give us an idea of whether that would be a plausible approach, looking at those very large pension funds and seeing if they could be used, rather than tax individuals—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member for York West has 20 seconds to respond.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, we need to look at all opportunities and all suggestions as to what is the better way. At the end of the day, we need to contribute more into programs like the CPP, and ensure that they are well protected and that they protect pensions for everyone. That means bringing them up so that they are part of a piece of legislation, as the Liberals tried to do in 2005, that would protect them. Pensions need to be protected so that when companies go bankrupt, Canadians do not have to worry about their pensions.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to address this House on the motion introduced by the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek. This motion is consistent with measures we have called for and proposed here in this House for a number of years to improve income security for seniors and retirees.

The motion is aimed at expanding and increasing the Canada pension plan (CPP) and the Quebec pension plan (QPP). We can discuss this a bit later, but I believe that our NDP friends and the Conservatives agree that this part of the motion should be withdrawn, because Quebec has jurisdiction over the Quebec pension plan and has done its job well to date.

This motion is also aimed at expanding and increasing the guaranteed income supplement and old age security to ensure all Canadians can count on a dignified retirement.

The motion also has the following objectives:

- (b) establishing a self-financing pension insurance program to ensure the viability of workplace sponsored plans in tough economic times;
- (c) ensuring that workers' pension funds go to the front of the line of creditors in the event of bankruptcy proceedings;
- (d) in the interest of appropriate management of the CPP that the Government of Canada immediately protect the CPP from imprudent investment practices by ceasing the practice of awarding managers performance-based bonuses;
- (e) take all necessary steps to recover those bonuses for 2009, ensuring managers in the future are paid appropriate industry-competitive salaries.

This motion is quite appropriate in two respects, given the current situation regarding pension funds. First, pension funds are no longer secured because they are being used to help deal with the crisis. Second, because of the double standard, managers will give themselves excessive bonuses that are often inappropriate and unwarranted, dipping into pension funds and forcing workers to give up their own security.

It is, I would point out at the start, totally appropriate to recall Motion M-300 by my colleague, the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot which addressed four issues: With respect to the guaranteed income supplement, there should be automatic registration in future; there should be a \$110 monthly increase in benefits; there should be full retroactivity for seniors who have been shortchanged by the fact that the government never bothered to ensure that those who were entitled in the supplement in the past received it; and payments should be continued for six months to supplement recipients after the death of a spouse. It is therefore appropriate to revisit the measures set out in that motion, M-300, from my Bloc Québécois colleague, which will soon be discussed and debated here in the House.

With respect to this motion, the Bloc Québécois is extremely concerned about the situation of our seniors. We believe that, before giving any thought to changing private pension plans, the government should improve the guaranteed income supplement, in order to allow all seniors in Quebec and in Canada to benefit from an income that is at least equivalent to the poverty level. The government ought to also take advantage of this opportunity to remedy the injustices caused to seniors who have been shortchanged by the guaranteed income supplement. Another measure that could

readily be put into place is ensuring that workers' retirement funds take priority over other creditors in the event of bankruptcy.

• (1155)

There has already been a bill passed by the House that includes two essential clauses to protect retirement plans. All that is required for them to become law is an order in council. Workers whose employer falls under the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act or the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act are just waiting for that order in council so that their pension plans will have some degree of protection. The measures have been passed in this House and are not yet enacted because of governmental neglect, with its laissez-faire attitude.

Unfortunately, the Conservative government, true to form, is plunging many workers into great insecurity with its laissez-faire attitude.

As for other discussions that might take place with the provinces, Quebec and the federal government in order to have improve private pension plans, including creation of retirement insurance, the Bloc Québécois is in favour if, and only if, such discussions do not encroach on their respective areas of jurisdiction.

Finally, with respect to the CPP's principles of internal management, we are of the opinion that the Bloc Québécois has no right to interfere, just as we believe that the federal government has no right to be interfering in the Quebec pension plan.

We believe that the government should immediately increase the guaranteed income supplement and reimburse the seniors who were shortchanged. During the summer and autumn of 2007, Bloc Québécois members travelled around Quebec to talk to seniors about their current and future needs and concerns. People in my own riding, Chambly—Borduas, took part in the consultation.

We consulted over 300 seniors and drew the following interesting conclusions. Over the past decade, seniors have been getting poorer. Even though pension funds and guaranteed income supplements have increased significantly in accordance with the consumer price index, except for a few errors over the years, the index has not been an accurate reflection of pensioners' and beneficiaries' situations.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to generalize when it comes to seniors across Quebec. Some are more active than others. Some live alone, some with their families, and some with others in independent or assisted living residences or in care homes. Some live in big cities, others in small towns. All of these factors make it difficult to paint an accurate picture.

There are other factors, too, such as education, past employment, place of origin or current residence, proximity of family members and help from those nearby. Our consultations enabled us to learn more about Quebec's seniors, their standard of living, their needs and their concerns in terms of their everyday lives and the future. We also had opportunities to talk about why some people are getting poorer, to propose solutions to various levels of government, and to find out what seniors think about Quebec society.

Business of Supply

As a result of the consultations, the Bloc Québécois made the following proposals: automatic enrollment for the guaranteed income supplement; a \$110 monthly increase in the guaranteed income supplement; full retroactivity of the guaranteed income supplement for those who have been shortchanged; and a six-month compensatory extension for any guaranteed income supplement recipient whose spouse has died.

●(1200)

In the 10 minutes remaining, I will try to set the context and describe the appropriate measures to be taken as of now.

In general, aging is accompanied by a decline in health and limitations on activities. The real situation of seniors changed during the 20th century. In 1901, life expectancy was 50 years for men and 47 years for women. In the span of one century, life expectancy has increased by 30 years, which is very significant. We have gone from a very small minority of people who lived to the age of 65 years to a majority of people who plan for and enjoy retirement.

A number of factors affect the well-being of seniors including finances, independence, isolation, community support and, of course, safety. Furthermore, income is one of the most important determinants of health and of a senior's ability to obtain the housing and transportation necessary to maintain independence. Housing, transportation and food together represent more than two-thirds of the expenses of seniors-only households. I personally know couples who spend their entire income on these items. That tells you how poor they are. Senior women living alone run a greater risk of financial insecurity than other groups in society.

In spite of enhancements to the guaranteed income supplement in recent years, more than 7% of Quebec seniors continued to live below the after-tax poverty line in 2006. Although the financial situation of seniors has improved over the past 30 years, 13.7% of seniors lived below the poverty line for at least one year between 1996 and 2003. That is serious.

With regard to seniors' sources of income, retirement income—for those with pension funds or RESPs—represents 29%, Old Age Security accounts for 27%, and the Canada Pension Plan or the QPP, the Quebec pension plan, represents 20%.

Since I am running out of time, I will move on to the solutions. Old age security is only one, albeit fundamental, part of the whole retirement income system and is funded through the government's general tax revenues. It provides a monthly pension to most people aged 65 and older who have been living in Canada for some time. The guaranteed income supplement provides additional income to low income seniors. Thus, it gives a little extra to those who need it. The big problem with all of this is that many of those people have not been able to benefit from the guaranteed income supplement because of this government's negligence or ill will.

The problem is as follows. In the past, in order to receive the guaranteed income supplement, the individual had to apply for it every year. Automatic renewal has only been in place for the past year or year and a half. However, people must first register in order to benefit from the automatic renewal.

The Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities examined

the issue following a survey conducted in Toronto in early 2001 by Mr. Shillington, a social statistician and policy analyst.

●(1205)

The study found that only 15% of seniors who were using food banks were getting the guaranteed income supplement, though nearly all were eligible for it. This is a catastrophe. That means that 85% of the people going to food banks should have been receiving the guaranteed income supplement, but were not.

The problem is this: many people often do not even know they are eligible for the GIS, in particular, people who have never worked outside the home, people who do not file income tax returns, aboriginal people, residents of remote communities, people with few literacy skills, people who do not read or speak either official language, people with disabilities or who are ill, and finally, the homeless. Yet the government knows who most of these people are; it is aware of their situation and knows that they are entitled to the guaranteed income supplement. The government's failure to act on this is appalling. It cannot be explained or excused.

What struck our committee most was that the human resources department had known about the under-registration for the guaranteed income supplement since 1993 and that the problem still persists today. This is a serious economic crime that is being committed against people who are among the most vulnerable members of our society, and the two major parties that have governed since 1993 have not only done nothing to correct the situation, but have deliberately ignored it. This is unforgivable and must be dealt with immediately.

The only justification given by the two successive governments, Liberal and Conservative, is that departments do not have the right to disclose sensitive information to each other about a person's income or tax return. From the outset, the Privacy Commissioner has allayed that fear, saying that such information could be disclosed because people's security was at stake and because it was being transmitted between two departments and two services that were required to keep it confidential. This has added to the considerable damage they have done to seniors and the crime committed by the two parties that have formed successive governments since 1993.

We know the consequences of their actions: people who are living in poverty, people who are often forced to sacrifice their quality of life by cutting back on what they eat or living in unsanitary housing conditions. What is being proposed is automatic registration. We believe that this measure is not only urgent, but needs to be implemented now.

We in this House have sometimes recognized that decisions needed to be fast-tracked. The government could use the fast-track approach so that the House could authorize improvements to the guaranteed income supplement and full retroactivity in order to address this serious crime against seniors.

Business of Supply

•(1210)

I would have liked to conclude by talking about retirees, but as the Chair is indicating that my time is almost up, I will come back to that.

In conclusion, I invite hon. members to vote in favour of the motion that is before us, and I also invite them to vote later for Motion M-300, which corrects all the flaws I have just described.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, the problem here is the whole issue of the investments. The problem began several years ago as the stock market boomed. We started allowing pension funds and other government entities to invest in equities when in fact they should have been sticking to GICs and government bonds, and if the return was not high enough for the required payout, they could simply increase the contributions to make up the difference. The government allowed the managers to start investing in equities, and of course, that is the root of the problem. Everyone can make money in good times, but problems occur in bad times.

I can recall a few years ago when a New York newspaper, I believe it was, set up a contest between a monkey and a number of stockbrokers. I think the member may recall this. Over several weeks the monkey and the stockbrokers picked a basket of stocks. Over the course of a month or so, the monkey won. Three or four years later, the process was repeated and the monkey won for a second time.

That shows what can happen when professional stockbrokers are hired with huge salaries and given extreme bonuses to get better results. Statistically, a monkey can do just as well.

We know that investing in just basic GICs might not provide great returns over the long haul, but at least the capital base will still be intact at the end of the day. That is the safest way to go.

We have a public insurance corporation in Manitoba. Just four or five years ago the Conservative government started allowing the corporation, for the first time in almost 30 years, to invest in equities. I guess right now they probably have some very bad results on their books because of that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Madam Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right. I think that the problem, where things went wrong over the years, is that people managing pension and investment funds to ensure the financial security of retirees should have been more concerned about those retirees than about profit for profit's sake, with all of the risks that entails.

Someone told me a story. I do not know if it is true, but I will share it with you anyway. A man went to see his banker. He was not rich and wanted to take a loan for something basic and very useful. The banker refused to give him the loan. The man would not give up, so eventually, the banker made a proposal. The banker said that before deciding whether to grant the loan, he would ask the man a question. The banker had a glass eye, and he told the man that if he could tell which of the two eyes was the glass one, he would get the loan. The man immediately answered that it was the left eye. The banker asked the man how he had guessed that it was the left eye.

The man said that he had noticed a little more kindness in the left eye than in the right one.

When people are responsible for managing funds that are supposed to guarantee the financial security of others, they must do so responsibly. The system falls apart when managers who do a terrible job are rewarded with excessive bonuses, while companies pressure workers to give up their pension funds.

•(1215)

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to commend the Bloc member for his ongoing commitment to workers and their families, and of course, to our seniors.

The motion today speaks about a private insurance guarantee fund. In the workplace today, defined benefit funds are under attack and some employers see them as a significant liability. From the standpoint of the workers, though, if they had an insurance program that could capture the assets should a company go bankrupt, they would probably be in a far safer position.

We know the forestry industry in Quebec has been devastated.

I would like the member's comments on the insurance plan.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Madam Speaker, there is insurance for all kinds of things. Pension funds should usually be self-insured. These funds must be secured given that employers and employees contribute to them and they are often managed by both or by one or the other, depending on their mandate. Sometimes they take the easy road, like when the government dips into the pension fund or fiddles with the employment insurance fund to pay for other things.

Considerable amounts of money that will serve as income security in the future are used for other purposes. People often take the easiest road. If the company experiences a temporary difficulty, it is given a contribution moratorium to deal with the problem. Or the employer's contribution is made over 10 years rather than 5. That is currently happening at Air Canada. The union agreed that contributions for some employees would be spread over 10 years. This makes the pension fund insecure. That is not the right thing to do.

Some things should remain sacred and pension funds are among them. Individual human beings—workers—keep the economy going and give value and meaning to our society. Yet they are the first to lose their assets when corporations and banks get into trouble. Often, it is not the workers who are at fault. It is a question of poor management.

Business of Supply

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to note that the market value of retirement savings held in employer-sponsored pension funds declined by \$58.1 billion, or 6.7%, during the fourth quarter of 2008 to \$810 billion. This was attributable mainly to a fall in the market value of stocks and equity funds, which, by the way, we would not have if they were in GICs and fixed-income funds. The drop followed a decrease of \$82.7 billion in the third quarter, which is the largest quarterly decline in a decade.

In my own portfolio, which is somewhat smaller than the numbers that I am indicating here, I have an absolute increase. I have zero losses because of the meltdown last year, only because I resisted the urge to invest in equities over the last seven or eight years, although I was chased around by lots of salespeople whose duty, they thought, was to try to encourage people.

I think what we have here is a retail market that catches fire and feeds on itself. People who have interest in making money out of these funds, because it is all about making money, will go to office and say, "Your fund is not doing well because you have been sticking with GICs all these years. Look at the other funds that are getting ahead of you. You have to hire me, the manager, who will get you into all kinds of fancy financial instruments that will make up for what you supposedly have lost". In reality, they have not lost anything, because at the end of the day when the market crashes, the fund that was high comes down to a low point.

One can play around with private funds but not with—

● (1220)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I apologize for interrupting. I will give 40 or 50 seconds to the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas to respond.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Madam Speaker, my colleague touched on a very important point. We sometimes place too much faith in the institutions or money managers we ask to manage pension funds. The mechanisms in place to prevent missteps are not enforced or are poorly enforced. Consider the small stock market crash of the early 2000s, when pension funds and registered pension plans dropped considerably, but they regained their value in four to six years. This was normal, because the funds were appropriately invested in relation to the businesses or markets that could regain their value.

The problem, and we saw this with the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec, is that the so-called experts invested in securities that could collapse without having any basic value. Commercial paper comes to mind. Commercial paper is an obvious example. That is why it is important to secure pension plans above all. RRSPs might need to be treated differently. We need legislation to ensure that workers are the first creditors in line in the event of bankruptcy.

[English]

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak in the debate today on an NDP opposition day motion regarding pensions.

At the outset, I will be sharing my time with the member for Vancouver East.

I want to pay tribute to my NDP colleague from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek for bringing forward this motion today. It is very timely. When we consider the worries of Canadians during this economic crisis, at the top of the list we have to put seniors, who are very concerned about their retirement incomes.

I want to review the text of the motion, so folks are clear on what we are talking about in this debate. The motion reads:

That, in the opinion of the House, in light of the legitimate concerns of Canadians that pensions and their retirement security may not be there for them in their retirement years, the Government of Canada should begin to work with the provinces and territories to ensure the sustainability of Canadians' retirement incomes by bringing forward at the earliest opportunity, measures such as:

(a) expanding and increasing the CPP/QPP, OAS and GIS to ensure all Canadians can count on a dignified retirement;

(b) establishing a self-financing pension insurance program to ensure the viability of workplace sponsored plans in tough economic times;

(c) ensuring that workers' pension funds go to the front of the line of creditors in the event of bankruptcy proceedings;

(d) in the interest of appropriate management of the CPP that the Government of Canada immediately protect the CPP from imprudent investment practices by ceasing the practice of awarding managers performance-based bonuses; and

(e) take all necessary steps to recover those bonuses for 2009, ensuring managers in the future are paid appropriate industry-competitive salaries.

This is a very comprehensive motion and it comes from the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek's work on this issue and his work across the country with seniors and pensioners to discuss the issues that are important to them. It places him clearly in the long line of New Democrats and CCF members who worried about pension income, income security and dignity of our seniors, people like J.S. Woodsworth, who was around for the creation of pension programs, and Stanley Knowles, who spearheaded the fight to protect pensions, to expand and improve them and to ensure that there was dignity in retirement, that there was dignity for seniors and that there was income security for them in their later years and in their retirement.

That is a long tradition from folks in this corner of the House, and the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek stands firmly in that tradition.

The first component of the motion today centres on expanding and increasing the CPP, OAS and GIS to ensure that all Canadians can count on a dignified retirement. It is very clear that many seniors in our country require stronger support measures than are currently offered through these very important programs. We want to ensure that people do not live in poverty in their retirement. We want to ensure they have comfortable lives, that having worked hard all their lives, they are provided for in their retirement. These pension programs are a key way that Canadians collectively seek to support each other as we age.

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It is very important that we regularly review and improve these programs. They were not cast in stone. They can always be improved, according to the situations of the day.

It is also important to remember that in this time of economic crisis, where we talk about measures to stimulate the economy, improving CPP, OAS and GIS has a major effect in terms of stimulating the economy. We know that every dollar put into these programs will actually be spent in the economy, that seniors living on pension incomes spend their incomes in the communities in which they live. They purchase services and goods. This money goes directly to support our communities and support other working people in those communities. It is a very effective way of ensuring that, dollar for dollar, we get good value for any kind of stimulus package. This corner of the House has always maintained that this should be part of any economic stimulus program.

● (1225)

It has been said in the debate this morning, and in other fora, that a \$1 billion increase in OAS and GIS would virtually eliminate poverty among seniors in Canada. Now, \$1 billion sounds like a lot of money, but I think in the context of having the outcome of eliminating poverty for seniors in Canada, it would be well worth that expense. I believe there is that kind of room in the government's planning. It would mean not going ahead with some of the corporate tax cuts that it has announced for down the road.

We could easily find that \$1 billion a year to dedicate to our seniors and to get economic value for that kind of investment. This is eminently possible should we have the political will and the wherewithal to move down that road. The benefit is huge.

Another aspect of expanding this kind of pension and old age security coverage would be to ensure immigrant seniors could qualify sooner for the old age security program. We know the 10-year wait for immigrant seniors often causes great hardship. Again, it is a hardship that is inappropriate in our society. Should they have that money in their pockets, we know that would go into our communities and would be well spent. That is another area where we could ensure an appropriate expansion of the old age security program.

The second element of the motion today would establish a self-financing pension insurance program to ensure the viability of workplace sponsored plans in tough economic times. We have heard major concerns about the viability of pensions, given the economic situation. We see that as being a major factor in negotiations around support for industries that are suffering in this economic decline.

There are some fairly straightforward solutions to dealing with that concern. Just like we have taken measures to ensure bank deposits, through measures like the Canadian Deposit Insurance Corporation, we could take similar measures to ensure the viability of workplace sponsored plans through a pension insurance program that followed that same model.

This has been done in other countries. It has been done in the United States. We have that model. It has also been done in Japan, Switzerland, Sweden and Germany. It is not a new idea, nor is a radical one. It is an idea that would give people a measure of security for their pensions and could be a significant measure for relieving

some of the worries about the ongoing viability of our pension plans. We already employ a particular model around savings in banks and it could easily be applied in this circumstance as well.

The third element of the motion today would ensure that workers' pension funds would go to the front of the line of creditors in the event of bankruptcy proceedings. This is something New Democrats have pressed for regularly in this place. In a recent Parliament measures were passed on the wage earner protection plan, which features some of these kinds of measures. Legislation was passed in Parliament and became law to put workers' wages at the front of the list in the event of a bankruptcy and at the front of the list of creditors when back wages were owed at the time of a corporate bankruptcy. It seems only fair, and I am glad it passed Parliament at that time. The argument is very clear that workers should have their wages paid in those circumstances.

This is a place where pensions need to be factored into the equation. We need to ensure that people's pensions and their pension plans are at the top of the line at the time of a bankruptcy.

Finally, on the practices of the CPP Investment Board over the last 10 years, if it had invested prudently, even in government bonds, it would have earned \$13 billion instead of losing \$24 billion in this past year alone. The practice of paying huge bonuses to the managers of that fund, \$7 million in bonuses in a year, when they lost \$24 billion, when they lost the equivalent of four years' contributions to the plan, is inexcusable. I think all Canadians are offended by that.

● (1230)

The member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek called it an obscene situation. As parliamentarians, the government has to address that situation and ensure the practice stops. There is no excuse, particularly at a time when the management of the fund has been so colossally unsuccessful. We need to address that quickly and soon so people have confidence in the management of the CPP.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his generous remarks at the beginning of his speech. They are certainly appreciated.

There is not a member present in the House that has any lack of caring for our seniors. When I started my remarks today, I talked about the fact that this was the opportune time for all parties to come together. Oftentimes in this place there is a certain cut and thrust to the debate and once in a while it drifts into the personal. However, in this case I rest assured that hon. members here all take the concerns of seniors very seriously.

I would like to ask the hon. member about beefing up CPP, allowing more access to it and by allowing some of the people who run small businesses to be a part of it. This is part of what we are talking about today. We think it is an important way to inject some immediate funds into the system.

A lot of people on OAS and GIS have partners who have passed away and that is all they have. There must be more we can do there. Could the member comment on that area?

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Could he also extend his comments somewhat on the defined benefits? If we have an insurance plan that supports them, then there will be more encouragement for companies to set those up with their employees.

• (1235)

Mr. Bill Siksay: Madam Speaker, in his speech, the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek talked about the private member's legislation on which he is working. This legislation will address many of those issues. I would encourage the government to steal his work. I am sure he would be thrilled if the government stole some of those ideas, took them off the order paper and introduced them as government legislation, as an omnibus bill to deal with pensions in Canada. I am sure we would all be thrilled if some of the work of the previous speaker from the Bloc was taken by the government on how we could improve the pension situation of Canadians.

I do not think we have extended or plumbed the depths of how Canadians can work together to support our seniors and ensure they have security in their old age. I do not think we have plumbed the depths of how appropriately we can support pensions and ensure they allow people to live with dignity in their retirement. We need to do that work as a Parliament.

I hear there is support in all four corners of the House for these kinds of measures and this kind of resolution. It is a great idea. It is a good sign about how we work together in the House. It is not every day we see that kind of consensus built in this place. I am glad we have found that way today, where we can work on an issue together that is of major concern to many Canadians.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am looking at the bonuses page of the CPP Board executives. David Denison the CEO received \$2,361,022 and three members of the board received equally high amounts. The government is abrogating its responsibility, saying it will send a letter to the board, chastising it.

Would the member suggest some stronger means? We know the government can be as tough on this file as it wants to be. It just does not want to take the action to get these members to give the money back. It is time it did.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Madam Speaker, the government could take tougher action. If it feels constrained by the legislation, then it could bring in new legislation. I am sure there would be lots of goodwill in this place to get those changes immediately and quickly through this place so we could address this obscene gesture, these obscene bonuses.

I am saddened that the Prime Minister seemed to excuse these outrageous bonuses at a time when the fund lost so much money. He was quoted in the *Toronto Star* as saying, "I actually noticed, by the way, that the board, in fact, did drop a total compensation for its executives by 31 per cent last year". That 31% down in bonuses to almost \$7 million is really hard to believe. It points out the need to address this, and Canadians would really want Parliament to deal with that issue.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to speak in support of the motion put forward by the NDP, specifically by the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, and I would like to thank that member for the tremendous work he

has been doing. As he told us when he spoke this morning, he has been travelling across the country talking to seniors about this important issue of pensions. We congratulate him for his very fine work.

It has been a good debate this morning. The motion before us is very comprehensive. It deals with the inadequacies of the pension system that many seniors are now facing. It deals with the inadequacy of the system in that people are not covered. It deals with the issue of the need for insurance. It deals with the outrageous bonuses that have been paid to the executives of the investment board that runs the Canada pension plan, and I will get into that later.

New Democrats are very proud to bring forward this motion. Our party has had a very long history of championing social policy, dating as far back as when J.S. Woodsworth first fought hard for the Old Age Pension Act, which was passed in 1927. We have a very long record of bringing forward issues that are based on social security, social equity. It is a value that very much represents Canada and what this country is all about.

We believe this is a key opportunity to examine our pension programs and to figure out what is failing, why they are not working properly and why so many people are not covered. I am certainly very happy to have this opportunity to speak to the motion.

In my community in east Vancouver, when we get case work, people coming to our travelling community offices, when I speak to folks at community events or I go to different meetings, this issue comes up all the time. We have so many seniors in our community who rely on the old age security and the GIS. They have very small Canada pension plan contributions because they are often immigrants who do not have a long record of making contributions to the plan. They may be women who have made very small or no contributions to the plan. Seniors in my community absolutely rely on the old age security and the guaranteed income supplement. These are not people who have thousands of dollars in personal savings, in RRSPs. I hear every day how tough it is for people to get through the month.

Even if seniors are lucky enough to own their own homes and they are paying their taxes, it is really hard to get through the month with the cost of living. We hear those stories every single day in my community. The aspect of the motion before us today that looks at the need to expand the Canada pension plan and the GIS is something that is really important. This is a priority.

We know from research that has been done by the Canadian Labour Congress that it would require about a \$1 billion investment to increase OAS and GIS to ensure it would virtually eliminate poverty among seniors. I know that sounds like a lot of money, but in terms of the federal expenditures in this place, and when that is compared to the corporate tax reductions, the bailouts, to many other expenditures that happen around here, it is actually a very small investment. How do you put a value on the benefit it would have in terms of the ability for people to live with a sense of dignity and respect in their older years? It speaks to the fundamentals of what this country is all about.

It is something that is very, very important. I hope very much that when this motion is approved, as I believe it will be, that this will receive great attention, particularly for older women. We know the gravity of the situation facing women who are unattached, who are single, who are living on these very small pensions. Often they are renters; they may not even own their own home, and they are living below the poverty line. Women in these positions are often almost invisible. They are not necessarily seen at the food banks or other social services. They see themselves as very independent, and yet they are really struggling.

● (1240)

The vast majority of Canadians would say that is not the way it should be. Women and men, pensioners generally, should be able to live with a sense of security and dignity as they are aging, and they should not have to worry every single day whether they have enough money to put food on the table or pay their phone bill or hydro bill.

The other aspect that is very important in the motion is the fact that our existing pension plans, whether the Canada pension plan or private pension plans, really do not deal with people who are self-employed. It surprised me at first, but it does not surprise me now.

I have heard about this issue probably more than anything else, the number of younger people who are now self-employed. Because of the economy and the way the economy has changed over the last decade or so, there are many more young people who are self-employed and basically have no pension plan at all. They do not make contributions to the CPP; they do not have the money to set aside for RRSPs. These are people who might do quite well in terms of contract work and self-employment, but then they have other occasions where it is very difficult to survive.

I think it is a serious issue that we have a whole generation of self-employed people, who are independent, self-sufficient, contributing to society, and yet as they approach their later years they know they are facing greater and greater risk as they do not have that income security.

We know that only 38.5% of Canadian workers have pensions from the workplace. That is actually very low. I am sure a lot of people would be surprised to hear that. We know that nearly one-third of workers have no retirement savings at all. These are people who are not even able to contribute economically to private pension contributions like RRSPs. This is very serious.

I think we have the sense in this country that we have great social programs and things are pretty good, but when we actually examine it more closely, we can see that many people are being left behind.

Therefore, I want to make sure with this motion that there is an examination and proposals that come back that will look at this question of how we ensure there is pension coverage for self-employed people, particularly the younger generations.

This is not just an issue that affects seniors today. It certainly does, but we are also talking about the generation behind and the generation behind that, people who will be moving into retirement years and who will be facing very high-risk situations.

The other point I want to make, as others in our caucus have, is on this quite outrageous situation with the bonuses. We certainly think

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the motion addresses that. We hope it will pass and that we can make sure those bonuses are recovered.

I think there is a consensus that is growing in the House around this motion today. To help facilitate that, I would like to move an amendment. I move:

That the motion be amended as follows:

(a) in the first paragraph, inserting after the word "forward" the words "for review by the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Research Working Group"; and

(b) in the second paragraph deleting "/QPP".

● (1245)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): It is my duty to inform hon. members that an amendment to an opposition motion may be moved only with the consent of the sponsor of the motion. Therefore, I ask the hon. member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek if he consents to this amendment being moved.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Madam Speaker, I am most pleased to accept this amendment in the spirit that we have set about this debate in the House today.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Therefore, the amendment is in order.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Madam Speaker, one of the important features of the motion talks about ensuring that workers' pension funds go to the front of the line of creditors in the event of bankruptcy proceedings.

We have seen examples in the past where workers have lost wages at the time of a bankruptcy, but they have also had great concerns about what would happen to their pensions when the company they worked for went into bankruptcy. I wonder if the member could talk about some of the solutions to that kind of situation.

● (1250)

Ms. Libby Davies: Madam Speaker, this is indeed one of the elements in our motion today: to ensure that workers' pension funds go to the front of the line of creditors in the event of bankruptcy proceedings. One might wonder why we had to put this in. Back in 2007, the wage earner protection program act was passed into law. It was given royal assent; unfortunately, it was never proclaimed.

This is still very much an outstanding issue for workers who lose wages or pension contributions as a result of bankruptcy. This is something the NDP fought very hard for in the 2005 budget negotiations. We got this provision because it was an issue back then as well. It is even more so today, with the number of bankruptcies we are seeing and the increase in those.

It is an important part of the motion to ensure that workers receive at least some minimal protection where there is a bankruptcy. We are not talking about anything grandiose here; it is very minimal protection. But at least they go to the front of the line to get their wages and pension contributions covered, which we think is very important.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is my honour to speak to this motion. I will be splitting my time with the member for Wellington—Halton Hills.

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I want to congratulate the member for Vancouver East and the member for Burnaby—Douglas on their amendment, which represents the goodwill that has been established around this debate.

I have just received my copy of “Canada's Economic Action Plan, A Second Report to Canadians”. The headline of that economic action plan is that 80% of it already has been implemented. I really wanted to point that out and celebrate that. It is a tremendous record of achievement, something I am certainly very pleased with.

I will address the portion of the motion with respect to ensuring appropriate management of the Canada pension plan, or CPP, and specifically that the government protect it from imprudent practices.

First, let us be clear. The Canada Pension Plan Investment Board, or CPPIB, which manages the CPP, is not run by our government, nor was it run by the previous government. Rather, it is an arm's length crown corporation with a mandate to invest in the best interests of CPP members, maximizing the rate of return, and obviously to protect the fund from undue risk of loss. This mandate is consistent with other private and public sector pension plans in Canada.

The CPPIB is governed by a board of directors consisting of 12 experienced professionals appointed by the federal government in consultation with the provinces. We consult with the provinces. This is not something that the federal government does unilaterally.

Parliament itself, under the previous Liberal government, voted to give the CPPIB that independent mandate, and there was goodwill around that, as well. Listen to the words of the former parliamentary secretary to the finance minister, the current member for Richmond Hill. During the era of the previous Liberal government, he said:

It is imperative that the CPPIB be fully independent of governments.... This independence is critical to the board's success and for the public confidence in the CPP investment policy.

I agree with that.

What is more, under the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board Act, an act passed by Parliament, it clearly states that the board of directors sets the compensation for the CPPIB, not the government, not the finance minister. Indeed, the current Liberal finance critic, the member for Markham—Unionville, confirmed that interpretation, stating just on May 28, “It was a Liberal government that set up the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board as an independent agency independent of government.... It's not the role of the government of the day to micromanage this entity”. Once again, I agree with that.

The CPPIB is not run by politicians. Politicians do not make the CPPIB's day-to-day operating decisions or guide investments, something most Canadians appreciate should not be subject to partisan debate.

Moreover, the federal government cannot unilaterally alter the CPPIB or its mandate. In fact, changes to the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board Act require the approval of the federal government and at least two-thirds of the provinces representing at least two-thirds of the population.

I heard hon. members, and I have heard the debate that is going on today, suggest that we could bring forward a bill, we could pass it

immediately and we could get on with changes. In fact, we know that the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board Act specifically prevents that action because this is a partnership with the provinces.

Nevertheless, we realize the issue of executive compensation is something we have heard a lot about lately in the news, especially coming from the United States. Recently, we have also heard concerns raised here in Canada, albeit to a much different and lesser degree. Our government agreed that this is an important matter and one that merited examination. That is why we have already taken action on that front.

My colleague from Macleod, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, has said in this House that compensation must be reasonable. I agree with that. I think all Canadians agree with that.

● (1255)

As members are likely aware, the finance minister recently wrote to the chair of the CPPIB, along with all similar crown entities, to order a review of all their compensation practices. This review will ensure their practices fall in line with Canada's international commitments on this matter, specifically the Financial Stability Forum's principles for compensation practices that were endorsed by all G20 leaders this past April.

These very comprehensive principles, which are part of the worldwide effort to fix the global financial system, laid out firm standards with respect to executive compensation practices that require: first, that boards of directors play an active role in the design, operation and evaluation of compensation schemes; second, that compensation be aligned with prudent risk taking and not reward excessive short-term risk taking where risks are realized over long periods; and third, that there be clear, comprehensive and timely public disclosure of information about compensation. We know in this case there certainly has been public disclosure and I believe it is clear and comprehensive.

Our government believes these principles are the appropriate response that will guide both private and public sector financial institution compensation practices, helping ensure they are consistent with long-term goals and prudent risk taking. That is why Canada, alongside all other G20 countries, endorsed these principles. It is why we ordered the CPPIB and all similar crown entities to examine their compliance with these very principles.

After entities such as the CPPIB report back to the government, we will judge their compliance. If we feel they do not comply with any of the principles which I have just outlined for the House, they will have to correct those non-compliant practices as quickly as possible.

I am sure that most members, putting partisanship aside, would agree that this is a measured and appropriate response to this issue, a response that ensures the CPPIB and its pension investment decisions are not subject to the political interference, as some members in the House are advocating.

The NDP has a history of advocating explicitly for political interference in the CPPIB. That is inappropriate. It is not beyond its right but, personally, I think it is inappropriate. Without getting into it, there are several members in the NDP who have specifically recommended guidelines for investment.

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I want to point out some of the principles that the CPPIB follows. The CPPIB has a policy of responsible investing related to environmental, social and governance factors. For the people watching this debate, it is publicly available online at www.cppib.ca. Moreover, the CPPIB is one of the signatories to the UN Principles for Responsible Investment, the Carbon Disclosure Project, the Enhanced Analytics Initiative, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and more. We can see that the CPPIB is very responsible.

Nonetheless, the NDP's position begs the question: Do Canadians really want politicians directing CPP contributions into investments that they deem to be in line with their interpretation of Canadian values? We have great debates in the House and we work hard for agreement, although we do not always find it. Therefore, I do not think we should be directing the CPP as to what its values should be. We realize the NDP would seemingly like politicians to control the CPP fund, but the current framework, endorsed by Parliament, ensures pension investments will not be subject to political interference.

I represent the riding of Peterborough. Some members would suggest they represent a lot of seniors. I am certainly no exception. I have a very large riding with a population well in excess of 120,000. Demographically, we are where most of the country will be at 2020, so the population of my riding is a little more advanced in age. It puts special strains on the health care system as well.

I have concerns about single or widowed seniors and the challenges they face because they have a little less pension income than married seniors do. I have concerns around that. Those concerns are shared by all politicians. We all want to make sure that our seniors are well cared for. That is why we make the contributions we do.

● (1300)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, in the last 10 years the CPP fund would have made \$13 billion more than it did if it had been invested in government bonds rather than in a diversified portfolio of equities, real estate and bonds.

Why are CPP investment managers being paid millions of dollars in bonuses based on any of the time periods, one year rolling, four years or ten years? They have not been producing value-added returns above risk-free bonds. In the past four years they have not achieved the returns required for long-term sustainability of the CPP.

David Denison earned a bonus of \$2.3 million and the Conservative government said that there is nothing it can do about it. The government said that it should not interfere with investments made by the board. The rules are there so that the managers do not get influence on individual investments, but there is no rule against our making a rule saying that they have to invest in fixed term investments as opposed to equities. The government should look at making a broad rule stating that the board has to stay away from equities. I believe the government could actually replace the board if it wanted to do that.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Madam Speaker, I actually believe that the CPP Investment Board is very well managed. It is easy to look in the rear view mirror and say that if the managers had chosen option A

instead of option B, we would be further ahead. There are an awful lot of investors right now who, if they had known back then what was going to transpire over the last few months, they would have a lot more money than what they have today. That is the benefit of hindsight, and that is what the member is speaking about.

It is important that the fund be managed by professionals who understand investing, professionals who understand that their duty is to protect the public money that is in the Canada pension plan.

I do not believe the intervention that is being mentioned is appropriate.

We talk about a lot of crown corporations in the House and how they are at arm's length from the government, CBC being one of them. I questioned the CBC on the bonuses that it was paying to its executives while it was laying off some 800 people. I was chastised for just asking whether it felt that was appropriate. Why is there a double standard in this case?

Mr. Jim Maloway: Madam Speaker, in my home province of Manitoba we have a public insurance corporation which, for its first 25 or so years of existence, was mandated to stay with fixed income investments. That policy was laid out by the NDP government that set up the corporation and that policy was followed by successive Conservative governments. No changes were made at all.

At some magical point about 10 years ago when the equities market started taking off, corporations such as the public insurance corporation were mandated to start looking at equity investments. That is about the same time the federal government made the same move.

All we are saying is that in retrospect, that was the wrong move. We should never have gotten out of the tried and true fixed term investments, GICs and bonds. We should go back to them.

In the meantime, the government should either replace the board or order those people to get out of equity investing, stop taking bonuses, and pay back the—

● (1305)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Once again, Madam Speaker, why the outrage on these bonuses to this crown corporation? Why the double standard? Why can we not have a little consistency on this? Why do we say that some professional boards should not get a bonus, but we say that bonuses are okay for other professional boards that have a similar record, that are under economic pressure right now, that are losing money? That is a double standard.

For example, the Ontario teachers' pension fund is a pretty successful fund that makes a lot of money. In fact, it owns the Toronto Maple Leafs, a team which I happen to follow, a team that I have cheered for my entire life. That fund makes a lot of money. It does not just invest in government bonds and so forth; occasionally, it takes prudent risks. That is what it is about. Investing is always about measuring risk and reward. I would argue that the CPP Investment Board has struck the right chord. It has done the right thing.

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We are at a point in time where there is no question that stocks over the last number of months have been challenged, but that is not the future of the market. The history of the market has always shown fluctuation, but over time it becomes stable. When it picks up, the CPPIB will also pick up. I hope that the member then will congratulate the board for the hard work it has done.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Peterborough for splitting his time with me.

I want to commend the New Democrats for putting forward this timely motion. Clearly the issue of underfunded pension and retirement plans for Canadians is a looming concern and a looming challenge in our country, so the NDP has done some service here to public debate and awareness in putting forward this motion. We may disagree on certain aspects of its proposal, but it is a timely measure and a timely motion on which to have this debate.

Clearly Canada is in the most severe economic downturn in 60 years. We are not alone in this. The International Monetary Fund has said that, for the first time in 60 years, the world's economy will contract this year. This has never happened before, in the last 60 years. This will be the first year in 60 years that global GDP will decline. I think that illustrates the breadth and depth of the global circumstances in which we find ourselves.

That said, I believe our government has acted swiftly on this crisis. Since this crisis started to unfold last autumn, the Government of Canada has reacted quite quickly in the intervening eight months. It has put forward an economic action plan that I believe has mitigated some of the downturn in which we find ourselves.

We have provided approximately \$62 billion in stimulus over the next two years. That includes stimulus that was triggered by provincial governments on part of our government's budget. That represents over 3% of GDP in stimulus funding in the next two years. I think that illustrates our government's quick reaction to this crisis, and we are starting to see some of the effects of that stimulus package take hold.

Our good economic position has also been recognized internationally. I quote from World Bank President Robert Zoellick, who said that, by global standards, Canada is in an enviable position. He said:

I think a lot of people would like to change places with Canada.

However, clearly, despite our government's interventions in the economy, private sector pensions and retirement savings for Canadians are an issue, and because of the downturn in global equity markets and global debt markets, many private sector pension plans in Canada are underfunded and many companies are struggling to recapitalize those plans.

It is important for Canadians to realize that only a fraction of the private sector pension plans in Canada are federally regulated. The vast majority of private sector pension plans are provincially regulated. I believe less than 10% of all private sector pension plans in Canada fall under the federal regulator. The balance fall under provincial regulation. As a result of these areas of jurisdictions, we do not have the biggest impact on pensions in the private sector .

That said, within our own responsibility of federally regulated plans, we have taken significant measures to try to mitigate the undercapitalization of retirement savings of Canadians. We have doubled the length of time that companies have to recapitalize their employees' pension plans, from five to 10 years. We have also increased the age, from 69 to 71, at which a Canadian who has an RRSP has to convert that RRSP to a registered retirement income fund.

We have also reduced, as a result of the downturn in equity markets and debt markets, the amount of money that seniors 71 years of age and older need to withdraw from RRIFs every year by 25%.

These are some of the measures we have taken. In addition to these measures, we are engaged with our provincial and territorial counterparts in the discussion of retirement savings and private sector pensions. On May 25, at a provincial, federal and territorial meeting, we struck a working group on retirement adequacy. This group will meet for the duration of this year and will report by the end of the year on the state of Canadians' retirement and pension investments.

In addition, the federal regulator, the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions, is continuing to monitor the situation and has indicated that she will act, if necessary, to protect the private sector pensions of Canadians.

● (1310)

We have done a lot of work to help mitigate the downturn in equity and debt markets globally that has impacted Canadians' RRSP investments, their RIFF investments, and their private sector pension investments.

I think the good news is that on the public pension side, on the public retirement safety net, we are in a very good position. The Canada pension plan is fully capitalized. It is fully there for Canadians. The most recent reports, audits and actuarial reports on this pension indicate that the pension is sustainable for years to come.

We have a generous old age security and guaranteed income supplement regime for Canadians as well. Both of these provide income for seniors that is at some of the best levels internationally. I am quite proud of that, because seniors have worked many years to build the kind of society we have today, and these retirement funds, these public programs, ensure that they will be taken care of in retirement.

I note that old age security and guaranteed income supplement provide up to \$14,000 a year for a single senior in Canada, and that the Canada pension plan provides up to \$11,000 a year for a senior in Canada. Combined, these three different programs provide up to \$25,000 a year for seniors in Canada. Clearly, on the public pension side and in the two programs of old age security and GIS, we have a generous and well-funded social safety net.

Business of Supply

I just want to speak briefly about some of the specifics in the New Democrats' motion with respect to pensions and retirement security. One of the five things that the motion calls on the Government of Canada to do is to expand and increase the Canada pension plan, the Quebec pension plan, old age security and the guaranteed income supplement.

While the government may want to consider enhancements to these programs at some future date, I think we also need to be cognizant of the fact that the current generation of working Canadians pays significantly higher premiums into the Canada pension plan than past generations. Canadians today pay a combined employer-employee contribution of 9.9% of their earnings into the Canada pension plan, almost 10% of their earnings. Increasing that amount hurts the current generation of working Canadians and would not be fair across the generations.

So I think we need to be careful about simply proposing to increase Canada pension plan payouts, because we may in fact hurt younger generations of Canadians who are struggling to pay their bills and to make their start in life.

The second thing that the motion demands of the Government of Canada is to establish a self-financing pension insurance program for private sector companies and private sector workers. This is certainly a debate that has started to take place with some of the recent bigger public pension managers in provinces like Ontario. It is debate that could take place through this working group that has been established by federal, provincial and territorial ministers. I think we should wait for the outcome of those consultations and those deliberations at the end of this year.

Let me comment on the third demand, which is to move private sector pension recipients to the front of the line when it comes to the order of creditors. I think we need to be careful about this issue as well, because companies have difficulty accessing commercial paper, raising capital in debt markets, raising capital in equity markets in the context of this downturn. I think we want to be careful not to hurt or affect their ability to raise that capital by changing too quickly or by changing inadvertently the order of creditors, which may have an impact on that ability to raise capital.

I note that the two final requests in this motion concern the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board. I would just say that I think it is important that we do not subject the Canadian pension plan to too much political inference. However, I will conclude by saying that I, too, am concerned that, in recent years, executive compensation packages have, far and away, exceeded the general rate of income growth for average workers in Canada.

• (1315)

When I hear that presidents and CEOs of certain companies are getting compensation in excess of \$15 million to \$20 million a year, I wonder if that is in the broader public interest.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the member whether he understands that defending the bonus of \$7 million is in effect an abrogation of responsibility. It is something that has average Canadians shaking their heads at a government that basically fiddles while Rome burns.

It is nice of him to say that he does not really like it, but you are the government. What are you going to do to ask these people to give this money back and stop taking future bonuses? You know that the government can—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I would ask the hon. member to direct his questions and comments to the Speaker. As he well knows, I am not the government.

I would ask the hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills to respond.

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Speaker, I do not think the solution is to target a single group of executives or a single institution with respect to executive compensation. As has been taking place abroad, I think we in Canada need to have a broader discussion about the public interest with respect to executive compensation. I do not think any Canadian would say that people should not be fairly compensated for the work they do.

Clearly, CEOs and senior executives at corporations take on a tremendous amount of responsibility and work. For that, they should be justly compensated. However, when one looks at the acceleration of growth in executive compensation in the last 20 years vis-à-vis the rate of income growth of the average worker, I think it does raise issues of concern.

In particular, I am not talking about the executive that is making a couple million dollars a year in compensation. I am talking about packages of income, salary and bonuses that amount to \$10 million to \$20 million annually.

When we start seeing rates of compensation like that, I think questions should be raised about whether those levels of executive compensation are appropriate and whether the government, in a general context, should take a look at imposing income taxes in a way that discourages that kind of compensation. I do not think anybody in Canada would disagree with that kind of debate and approach.

• (1320)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, this week, Teamsters Canada is having their convention here in Ottawa and I had the pleasure of addressing them yesterday. Prior to being elected, I worked for a Teamsters local and sat as a trustee on a employer and union jointly administered pension fund. It is the type of pension that many hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Canadians count on to provide for their retirement security.

I know what these jointly administered funds really need is for government to ease some of the funding and solvency tests that they often have to meet, particularly in the case of multi-employer plans, where there are very onerous solvency requirements that hamstring these boards in their ability to deliver the benefits.

I wonder if my hon. friend or the government has looked at the possibility of easing some of these rules so that we can have them prudently and securely funded, while also giving them the flexibility they need to provide the benefits that their members need.

Business of Supply

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Speaker, I think that is a very good question. It goes to the heart of the matter in the problem of these private sector pension plans.

The current regulatory regime for private sector pension plans is procyclical. In other words, in boom times, because of good returns on debt and rising equity markets, firms have to put less money into their pension plans at the very time they are most able to. In downturns such as we see today, because of declining equity markets, and in some cases, declining bond yields or defaults on bonds, one sees these pension plans decline precisely at the point where these companies are cash-strapped and unable to ensure the profitability to allow them to recapitalize their plans.

I am of the view that we need to figure out a regulatory regime that counteracts this procyclicality that we currently have. When we return to boom times again, I think the government should look at putting in place a tighter and more conservative recapitalization regime of, let us say, three years so that companies are forced during good times to put more money into their pension plans so that in downturns like this we can allow them more slack so that they continue with their ongoing operations.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Outremont.

I want to thank my colleague from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek for his intervention this morning on this issue and for his work. The member is going out across the country talking to, and most importantly listening, to seniors and to people who are affected by the pension squeeze that is happening right now.

We know that due to the economic downturn, due to the problems in terms of capital markets and investments that many pension plans were connected to, that many people are literally seeing their hard work disappear in front of their eyes when it comes to pensions.

It is crucial that the government and the opposition parties support our motion today. We were very deliberate in the motion to ensure that it was a comprehensive motion, that we were going to open it up to look to the future but also deal with the present.

This issue is not new to this side of the House, to our party. Members will know the history of Stanley Knowles and his dedication to make sure that seniors are not left in abject poverty, that they are compensated for the work of building this country. It is the work of people like Stanley Knowles, and people in civil society and communities right across this country that we actually have a pension system.

This was not something that was initially seen as possible. At the time when OAS and CPP were put forward by people like Stanley Knowles, it was suggested that somehow this was not affordable. Clearly, that is not the case and clearly, there is a role for government to coordinate and regulate pension funds. We also know what happens when there is no coordination and regulation of pension funds. The hard work of everyday people goes up in smoke and the people who really are not the ones creating the wealth take the money and run.

I can point to the experience of Nortel workers here in Ottawa. I do not think Canadians appreciate, unless they know someone who is from Nortel, what these workers are going through. People worked

all of their lives to make sure that research and development in the high tech industry was going to be the best in the world here in Ottawa particularly, but also in other places throughout Canada. They were dedicated. They worked to ensure that Canada was at the cutting edge of research and development. What they saw at the end of the day was a company that shaved off profits, pocketed it, and then laid them off. The greatest insult was that not only did it do that, but it did not even have the common decency to provide severance pay to the workers of Nortel.

There are some basic rules in a democratic society. One of them is fairness and the notion that individuals can work all of their lives and be laid off and not receive their severance pay, but to turn and see bonuses being handed out to people at the top who were responsible for the downturn in the company, is not only an insult to the Canadian fabric and values but also it is incredible to see no action being taken by government.

It is analogous to someone, after having built a house, being told to leave and not being paid the price of that home. That is exactly what the high tech workers in Ottawa did. They built the house of high tech of Nortel and what happened? The carpetbaggers came in, totally undermined the interests of the company, took the money, put it in their pockets, and then told the people who actually created the ideas and wealth that they could not even get the basic minimum of severance pay. This is not just a situation with Nortel, but it clearly exemplifies Nortel.

● (1325)

My question to the government and to the opposition parties: Are they okay with that? Will we stand by, shrug our shoulders, and say that is the way it works. Leave the private sector alone. It will be able to take care of itself.

On this side of the House, we are clear. There is a role for government to regulate. There is a role for government to ensure that the people who actually create the wealth, the innovators, the engineers who work slavishly to increase the value of a company and the products that are then spun off from that, will actually be recognized and paid fairly. It is very basic.

I point out the history of Nortel and the people who have been laid off. Right now the Canadian government has a golden opportunity to have Canadian interests protected by intervening. Right now, bankruptcy protection is going on in the United States. When the minister was questioned in the House, he did not seem to think there was anything we could do, that we had no role at the federal level. I would simply point out to the government and to my colleagues in the opposition parties that the American government is an intervener there because it has a pension protection fund. If Nortel were not providing compensation to workers, the money would come out of that protection fund.

Business of Supply

What happens in Canada is called employment insurance. Those workers go directly onto employment insurance when they have been laid off. They do not get severance. Who pays? It is us. When the federal government says it cannot do anything and that it is not its role, it is either incredibly ignorant or it has abdicated the responsibility to protect Canadian taxpayers and Canadian workers. There has to be some intervention by our government when it comes to the bankruptcy of Nortel. Otherwise we will just be fleeced. That is what is happening right now in real time.

The question is, does the government understand the role it has to protect pensions? Does it understand the role it has to protect Canadian interests? When companies go bankrupt, and not even bankrupt because they have bankruptcy protection, and they do not pay severance to their workers, the money comes out of EI, which is in Canadians' interests, and the public purse. I would hope it now knows it and it will actually intervene.

We also need to make sure that not only are Canadian interests protected when it comes to bankruptcy of Canadian companies and that workers are compensated fairly but we also have to change legislation so this cannot happen again. The idea that this could happen in the first place, where people who get laid off do not get their severance pay and end up on EI, is a matter of changing legislation. If we are not here to do that, the question is, what is the government doing here? Is it just sitting back and writing letters of suggestion? That seems to be the policy option.

We have had that with the credit cards. We have had it now with bonuses. When we look at the issue of fair compensation to workers who have paid in and do not get their severance, I sense another letter coming on.

The question is, why does the government not actually put in what we already have in place, wage protection, and ensure that severance is included and that pensions are protected as well. After all, these are the people who created the wealth. Without them, there would be no bonuses.

On the subject of bonuses, it is interesting to note that the United States will be capping bonuses to deal with the bonus situation. That is in the United States. There is a full article on the front page in yesterday's *Wall Street Journal*. If the United States are able to cap bonuses in private sector firms, the least we could do in this country is to go after a Canadian pension fund and ensure that bonuses are capped and that people pay back the money. That would do something. The Conservatives say they cannot do anything. It is political impotence and it shows no value in terms of what governments can do.

The government can call a meeting of all interested parties, be it provincial interests or at worker and business levels, and lay out an agenda. It should show some leadership and protect Canadians. At the end of the day, the motion at its heart is about protecting Canadians now and looking to protect Canadians in the future. It is about making sure we have equality in this country and that the people who create the wealth get rewarded for that, and that the people who are not creating wealth, but who are actually doing a disservice to our companies and to our economy, are not rewarded for that. Fundamentally, that is what this motion is about.

● (1330)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, I think one of the challenges of the New Democratic Party's approach on this is that we may do harm in other areas if we single out a single group of executives for special treatment. I think we need to be careful that we do not have a knee-jerk reaction to the broader issue of executive compensation.

I think many Canadians would welcome a debate, as is going on in broader international forums right now on executive compensation practices. However, if we are going to do anything, it needs to be of general import, it needs to be of general application. If we single out a single institution for special treatment with respect to executive compensation, there may be unintended consequences which may do even more harm to the pension plan or the investment board than we realize.

The first principle in many areas of life is to do no harm. Therefore, I think we need to think carefully about whether we want to do something that is specific to the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board rather than have a broader debate about compensation practices in Canada which would ultimately end up with something of general import.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Madam Speaker, we are having the debate right now. That is why we put the motion forward and I think it is an important one.

Regarding the member's concern, I actually think that we are not just isolating it to the CPP but it would deal with the CPP. It is one that we can actually do something about immediately because of its connection to government, and to the fact that this is a pension plan of all Canadians. Its oversight is shared with provinces and others but that is where we must start.

I think we need to confront this issue. As I said before, right now in the United States there is a pay czar, or call it whatever we want. We need to deal with that question.

There is a problem with the unintended consequences argument that the member suggests. If we do not deal with this, we are rewarding people who are actually in it for the short-term. The propensity of these bonuses is to amalgamate and cut operating costs, and to show stockholders that they are going to get a better return on investment, which is not good business practice. Then they are rewarded for that.

We have seen that time and time again. I have seen it here in Ottawa with the high tech sector and we have seen the hollowing out of the high tech sector.

I would submit to the member that continuing this path of allowing bonuses to go out to people who are basically hollowing out our key industries, strategic industries like high tech, is something we must stop. I say to him that this debate is we are having now is one way but some decision must be made on action.

Business of Supply

•(1335)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague who gave such a wonderful speech invoked the name of Stanley Knowles and J. S. Woodsworth who pioneered the concept of security for people in their old age.

We all know that the Canada pension plan in its current form does not provide that for people. It only is intended to and in fact is structured to provide only a fraction of what people need in retirement, even with old age security and the GIS.

I note that the current government is exploring with the provinces ways to come up with different kinds of programs. It would seem to me that the Canada pension plan is sitting right in front of us with an administrative scheme right there for us to simply start adding investments to it, so that we can apply those pensions.

I know the government talks about payroll taxes, but really pensions are simple. We get out what we put in. If we want secure retirements, we put in more money now. It grows and we take it out.

I wonder if my friend could comment on that concept.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Madam Speaker, I agree with my colleague from Vancouver Kingsway that this is the way to go. Many have pointed out that if we were to change the way that CPP is done, instead of the thresholds being 25% of pre-retirement, we would increase those thresholds.

What that would do is not only provide people with much needed income security but it would also stimulate the economy. It is an infrastructure that exists to stimulate the economy. We do not have to invent it. The Americans are a little bit behind in that infrastructure. We have it and this would be a way to change those pre-retirement thresholds from 25% up that would actually help people immediately, the people who need it. I think that is the way to go.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am extremely pleased to speak today to this important motion by my colleague from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek. I am also pleased that he asked me to second it. Let us keep in mind that its purpose is to provide proper protection for one essential component of the economic safety net for the people of this country, or in other words to guarantee them a decent income when they retire.

Over the past seven or eight months, many people have learned that they will not be able to fulfill their expectations of early retirement because their planning had involved RRSPs, which are often invested in the stock exchange. Their investments have, in many cases, lost 40% of their value over the past year. That is a shock. We are not talking just of people who managed their own RRSPs, but also of people working for well established companies. My colleague from Ottawa Centre has just cited Nortel as an example. A classic example, and we could also mention Air Canada. Last week, I was talking to some Air Canada mechanics who are very concerned. They have 28, 29, 30 years of service and do not know if they will have enough money for their retirement when the time comes. This is a major concern.

So my colleague from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek has introduced a motion to accomplish a number of things. First of all,

to expand and increase retirement pensions. A slight amendment will be proposed in order to fix a problem with one reference. This will ensure the support of our motion by the 49 colleagues of the Bloc Québécois. It also speaks of establishing a self-financing pension insurance program to ensure the viability of workplace sponsored plans in tough economic times. This is the cornerstone of the proposals we have before us. Proposals as my colleague has explained today, which would ensure that our pensions are guaranteed, somewhat along the lines of the Canadian government's deposit insurance that guarantees our bank deposits.

Let us look at some of the things the government is responsible for. For example, for certain things such as food inspection—since food often goes across borders—the federal government is responsible. As we have seen with certain essential issues, basic issues of public protection, the Conservative government has not grasped what the mandate of the state is. It is almost as if it had some objection to it. There are a number of similar examples that have cropped up in the last three years of the Conservatives' abandonment of the public. Here again, if no action is taken, people are once again going to be abandoned at a time of serious economic crisis.

I am reassured, though, by the fact that the Conservatives have proposed an amendment, which, as I interpret it, gives us reason to believe—because we will agree to it—that they will be supporting our motion.

The motion also contains a proposal that workers' pension funds have priority in the event of bankruptcy. It is not right that someone who built the company and gave it value should have to go to the end of the line when creditors are being ranked. A former worker has the same rank as someone on Wall Street who has a claim against the company that has sought bankruptcy and insolvency protection. We feel that this is unacceptable. This government, this country and this Parliament have to make it a priority to protect these people. Many people learn the hard way that their pension is not protected at all.

Lastly, there is one thing we also wanted to talk about today that is extremely disturbing, and that is the issue of the bonuses that the directors of the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board paid themselves. It is incredible.

They came to see me in my office. I am the NDP finance critic, so it makes sense. People come and say what they have to say. It was before they announced that they had lost more than \$23 billion, an astronomical amount. They came to see me, and it was pretty clear to me at that point that they were planning to pay themselves bonuses again this year, believe it or not, after losing \$23 billion last year.

Their reasoning went something like this. We should not look at the \$23 billion in taxpayers' money that they had just lost. Instead, we should look at it in terms of a four-year rolling average.

•(1340)

The only one not on a roll in this is the taxpayer. I told them that they have understood nothing if they do it this year. We are in an economic crisis. The public would not stand for it and Parliament would never permit it.

Business of Supply

Interestingly, when we put our initial questions to the government on this, we got nowhere. It took two weeks of outrage. I remember the front page headline of the *Toronto Star* with pictures of the four principal directors and under that a description of the public outcry. It took all that for the Conservatives to begin to understand that people no longer put up with this sort of thing and that it was time for a change in attitude.

In the end, rather weakly, the Minister of Finance announced he had written the chair of the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board to demand that they analyze the projected bonuses in the light of the G20's position aimed at controlling inflation in terms of the bonuses business leaders were giving themselves.

Let us make no mistake. The monumental salaries paid in firms such as Goldman Sachs in London reflected the fact that these businesses were making money from nothing by taking positions on this and that. So people were paying themselves extraordinary bonuses until everything started to crumble. With a presumptuousness never before seen, they went hat in hand to taxpayers in order to fill up their coffers. The incredible part is that they actually managed to do so.

This, however, is a public institution managing in the public domain. We have nothing against them and do not want to deprive them of a salary, even a substantial one. These people, we have to realize, paid themselves bonuses of several million dollars again this year, despite their record losses, while they earn more than the Prime Minister and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada.

They are not poor. They are not mistreated. They are not being told that their houses and their cars are going to be seized. What they are being told is that they are already very well paid. A bonus should be something exceptional for an exceptional performance. This year with their losses, any bonus they got should have been a negative one. Something should have been taken away from them.

This is why we find it unacceptable that the government has done nothing yet. The letter from the Minister of Finance may produce nothing, but in the name of decency in public administration, they should have acted more quickly and more decisively. However, they hid behind other authorities and other institutions. They should have told them this was unacceptable and that they would not stand for it.

Just to further convince you, they persuaded themselves that the amount was not so bad over four years. However, over the same four-year period, their performance was lower than the basic rate of inflation in the economy. Over a similar period, had they bought Government of Canada savings bonds, they would have made an additional \$13 billion. These people convinced themselves that they had set standards, benchmarks. They have a fine way of describing benchmarks

● (1345)

[*English*]

A Nobel prize winner in economy said that benchmarks were a cross between a Ponzi scheme and groupthink.

[*Translation*]

Some say they are not as bad as other people. That is pure bunk. This is why it is so important we all rise in this House to send a clear

signal. If these people think they are so good as to deserve millions of dollars, they should have the decency to resign. Let them do us all a favour. Let them resign and see what they are worth in the private sector. I think they will get the shock of their life.

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Madam Speaker, once again, we have members of the NDP standing and calling on intervention from the government on the CPPIB. Once again, they are standing saying that the government needs to intervene and tell these guys how to run the show.

I think it would be a terrible marketing idea for any investment bureau, any investor at all to say "Hey, I'm an NDP investor, invest with me and I'll make you a fortune. By the way, we're going to increase corporate taxes, we're going to intervene, we're going to do all kinds of things, which are interventionary on the market". This is absolutely preposterous. Once again, it is a clear double standard. Some crowns we should intervene on bonuses. For others, we should be completely hands-off.

Why have the NDP members picked this issue? Why are they coming down on these investment professionals? Why not other groups? When I asked the question about CBC bonuses, during a time when it was laying people off, why did the NDP accused me of being mean to the CBC? I do not know.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Madam Speaker, that is coming from a state capitalist who just took \$10 billion of taxpayer money to make himself the boss of an auto company that has failed? He is giving us lessons? He has to be kidding.

My comrade seems to forget that we are talking about a public institution investing public contributions. It lost \$23 billion of public money. Those people should be wearing a dunce cap, not giving themselves million dollar bonuses.

● (1350)

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the extraordinarily distinguished member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor.

Business of Supply

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this issue and I congratulate my colleague from the NDP for bringing it forward for discussion today. Retirement incomes, the life of our seniors in this country, is a huge issue that faces many Canadians. I think all Canadians are feeling this, whether it is them personally, whether it is their family, or whether it is their neighbours. This is a huge issue that affects many Canadians in the country today. I think all MPs have heard the stories. I have certainly heard from seniors in my riding, many of whom thought they might okay in their retirement years and all of a sudden have to relook at their income, and in some cases, have to go back to work years after they retired, because they do not have the resources they need.

There are number of negatives issues that affect all Canadians, or a large percentage of Canadians. The punitive tax on income trusts that was brought in, in sort of a blitzkrieg motion by the government a couple of years ago, hurt Canadians. I very well recall one of my constituents calling me up and saying, "Mike, look, I didn't invest in income trusts. I'm not a big investor. I never looked for very much of a return. I was always very prudent. However, when at that time the opposition leader, now the Prime Minister, said he was not going to tax them, I thought, okay, nobody can go back on that". So he invested, and he lost \$16,000. That may not sound like a lot to some people, but it is a lot of money to a lot of people in this country.

The other thing, of course, that has hurt a lot of Canadians is the falling stock markets. A lot of people who thought they were fine are now being hurt very severely by the falling stock markets. I have heard people say, "Well, they should not have invested in the stock market. Maybe they should have invested in a more secure mechanism". However, people make decisions in a lot of cases based on advice of others, and some people had been told, "Look, the market always goes up. Why don't you invest?"

I recall not that many years ago that people were rushing away from defined benefit pension plans into defined contribution pension plans, thinking this was the way to go. All of a sudden the market is bringing in 15% a year and people think, "I'll get into that". A lot of those people have been hurt very badly. That has hurt an awful lot of Canadians. That has hurt a lot of citizens in this country who thought their retirement years were going to be okay.

It is a very sad story, because if people my age or younger all of a sudden find themselves with less income than they thought, at least they have the option of perhaps going back to work, or they at least have more options in terms of replacing income. If it happens to a senior in this country, the options are very limited. So we have to do something as a country to protect those people.

I want to focus my remarks, though, specifically on the poorest Canadians, Canadians who are living in poverty.

There has been some good news over the last number of years to offset the bad news—the solid work by previous governments, particularly the Chrétien-Martin government of the last decade, which made tough decisions. People look back and say, "Well, that was easy". It was not easy. It was a tough decision to rescue the CPP and to make it financially solvent for years to come. That was done in a forward-thinking process just over a decade ago. It was the right thing to do.

The other thing is that we have increased seniors' benefits in this country and it has made a difference in Canada. OAS and GIS are very important. We have shown in Canada that we do value senior citizens.

As a matter of fact, the rate of poverty has gone down over the last number of years among seniors. If we look at a report from the Caledon Institute, entitled "The federal role in poverty reduction", which was presented to the human resources committee a couple of months ago as part of our study, it stated:

Canada has made substantial strides in reducing poverty among the elderly, the rate plummeting from 29.0 percent in 1976 to 5.4 percent in 2006.... Canada ranks third lowest among 23 industrialized nations, bested only by Finland (5.2 percent) and Sweden (2.7 percent).

This huge reduction in poverty is due largely to improvements in public pension programs (Old Age Security, the Guaranteed Income Supplement and the Canada and Quebec Pension Plans) and the historic rise in the labour force participation of women, who thereby become eligible for pensions in their own right from the Canada and Quebec Pension Plans and employer-sponsored plans....

However, the work is not finished: Some seniors remain in poverty....

The report particularly cites single elderly women and single elderly men, with single elderly women having a much higher rate. So that is an issue.

● (1355)

Even since then we have seen more seniors face very difficult times in this country. We need to have a national anti-poverty plan that includes seniors. One would think that was self-evident. The human resources committee, under the distinguished leadership of the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook, who has worked very hard, and other members in the House today, has proceeded on that work.

On Monday of this week we got word that, in the periodic review of the Human Rights Council of the UN, Canada was asked to look at certain things in terms of making life better for its citizens. One of the key recommendations was recommendation 17, which stated that the Government of Canada should have an anti-poverty strategy. Amazingly, the response to that from the Government of Canada was this:

Canada does not accept recommendation 17 or the related recommendation from Ghana to develop a national strategy to eliminate poverty. Provinces and territories have jurisdiction in this area of social policy and have developed their own programs to address poverty. For example, four provinces have implemented poverty reduction strategies.

There are now six provinces that have poverty reduction strategies. Quebec has always been a leader in terms of progressive social policies. The province of Newfoundland and Labrador, long before it had money rolling in, decided it would have an anti-poverty strategy. There was a meeting with the minister at that time, Shawn Skinner, who outlined some of the stuff that the province of Newfoundland and Labrador was doing.

Ontario, under the distinguished leadership of Deb Matthews, has an anti-poverty strategy. Manitoba now has one. Nova Scotia has one, and although I do not think it is particularly robust, it is at least a good start. The province of New Brunswick has one on the way as well.

One thing that all those provinces have in common when they talk about poverty is that the federal government has to come to the table. At this point in time—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. There is a debate going on.

I would ask for some order, please, from the hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

Mr. Michael Savage: Madam Speaker, one of the things that all the provinces that have anti-poverty strategies have indicated is that the federal government needs to have an anti-poverty strategy.

In fact, let us look at the report from Ontario's poverty reduction strategy, "Breaking the Cycle". Again I will mention Deb Matthews, who has done fabulous work on this. She was at the Canadian Social Forum in Calgary a couple of weeks ago and spoke about the work she has done.

She specifically has a chapter in this report entitled "The Federal Role", because we do live in a country that has federal, provincial, even municipal jurisdictions. There are NGOs and organizations that do a lot of good work, but there has to be leadership at the federal level. This is as true on the senior side as it is anywhere else. For Canada to suggest that we do not need a national anti-poverty strategy is simply wrong. There are things that we can do.

I was very pleased that in the Liberal election platform last year, called "Richer, Fairer, Greener", one of the recommendations was to increase the guaranteed income supplement by \$600 a year for Canada's lowest-income seniors, and by \$800 a year for low-income senior couples. It goes on to talk about changing the CPP disability requirements to ensure that those with episodic illnesses, such as MS or others, do not jeopardize their ability to collect CPP or QPP disability benefits.

We have to understand that Canadians are living longer now. That is the good news. That is due to advances in health and welfare. The problem is that a lot of people are not able to afford those later years in spite of the fact that in many cases they planned for it for a long period of time.

We have examples of people, like the Nortel employees, who are facing a very difficult circumstance now that they never planned on. They never thought this would happen to them, and who would blame them? There is stuff happening in Canada to seniors that is simply not fair.

How do we fix it? There are organizations such as CARP. Susan Eng, from CARP, made a very strong presentation to the anti-poverty committee the other day about what she thinks has to happen for seniors. CARP is calling for social change to bring financial security, equitable and timely access to health care and freedom from discrimination for Canada's elderly, ensuring that the marketplace serves the needs and expectations of this generation of persons aged 50 and over, and building a sense of community and shared values. It calls for more relief for retirees and better protection of seniors. Like many others, it is saying that the GIS is the perfect thing to invest in and we should increase the GIS.

Statements by Members

● (1400)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour will have his period for questions and comments after question period.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Madam Speaker, this month marked the 50th anniversary of the Knights of Columbus council at Holy Rosary Cathedral in Regina.

For 50 years, Catholic men from Holy Rosary have worked in and around Regina to serve the community and live out the gospel message.

The Knights of Columbus is a worldwide Catholic institution. The organization was founded to render financial aid to members and their families. Mutual aid and assistance are offered to sick, disabled and needy members and their families.

Today, the works of the Knights are numerous. The United in Charity initiative supports numerous charitable organizations around the world dedicated to alleviating poverty, providing health care for those in need, and building homes for the homeless.

The Knights are also one of the most active Catholic organizations in the promotion of the sanctity of human life. From raising money for pro-life causes to providing assistance to expectant mothers in at-risk situations, Knights work tirelessly to protect life in its most vulnerable stage.

I would like to thank all my brother Knights at Holy Rosary Cathedral for their very important contributions and congratulate them on their 50th anniversary.

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LEARNING ENRICHMENT FOUNDATION

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to extend my congratulations and appreciation for the work that has been accomplished by the Learning Enrichment Foundation as it celebrates 30 years of service to York South—Weston.

LEF has brought a holistic approach to employment in York South—Weston and across the greater Toronto area. From serving the unemployed by way of skills and educational training, to assisting new immigrants, to providing the self-employed with the tools to start a new business, LEF has become an integral part of job creation in Toronto.

On May 20, this momentous occasion was celebrated while remembering those past who helped LEF reach its 30th year. Former president, Donald MacDonald and former executive director, Eunice Grayson, were pioneers of this organization and have left behind a legacy that will contribute to the future growth of the organization.

Statements by Members

I invite the House to join me in honouring the current president, and former mayor of the City of York, Fergy Brown, the staff and volunteers at LEF who continue to serve this community well, and we look forward to another 30 years of service.

* * *

[Translation]

CLIC INTERNATIONAL

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Madam Speaker, Laval-based CLIC International, founded in 1984, was recently awarded a 2009 MercadOr. The prize is a special way to highlight the achievements of export companies in the Laval, Laurentian and Lanaudière regions.

CLIC is clicking with global consumers. CLIC International products include rice, couscous, beans and canned vegetables, and can be found in most grocery stores. CLIC exports some 1,600 different products around the world.

CLIC's proven secret to success involves choosing to do business directly with producers, farmers and cooperatives. CLIC also guarantees that all products shipped to a given retailer or wholesaler will sell.

The Bloc Québécois would like to congratulate the president and founder of CLIC International, Assaad Abdelnour, on winning this prize.

* * *

[English]

KOMAGATA MARU

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, May 23 marked the 95th anniversary of one of the most shameful events in Canadian history. On that date in 1914, the Japanese ship *Komagata Maru* arrived in Vancouver with almost 400 passengers. Most of these people were Sikhs, and there were also Hindus and Muslims aboard.

While they had every legitimate reason to be welcomed to Canada, the Canadian government did not allow them to disembark. In truth, this decision was a racist one, taken to prevent South Asians from entering our country.

The ship remained offshore for two months and was then forced to return to India where 20 passengers were killed by British troops. This is a black mark in the history of B.C. that has long cried out for redress.

I just attended a moving vigil in Stanley Park very near where the ship was anchored. I listened to thoughtful words spoken by representatives of the Professor Mohan Singh Memorial Foundation and of the South Asian community, people such as Sahib Thind, Jasbir Sandhu and Raj Hundal.

Their words were clear: They want what is just and long overdue, a proper and dignified apology in the House of Commons by the Prime Minister of Canada. They deserve it and I urge the House to work together to do so.

ALS AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Madam Speaker, June is ALS Awareness Month. ALS, also known as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, is a fatal motor neuron disease that affects approximately 3,000 Canadians.

Each June, friends, family and supporters of those suffering from ALS dedicate their time to raise awareness of this devastating disease and to raise funds for a cure.

This cause is very close to my heart as my father succumbed to ALS a number of years ago. Since my personal encounter with this terrible disease, I introduced a private member's bill to have June officially designated as national ALS month.

I encourage each member to wear a cornflower today to show their support for this important cause. I also congratulate the ALS Society for the excellent leadership it has demonstrated in funding research to improve the quality of life of Canadians affected by this fatal disease.

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● (1405)

ALS AWARENESS MONTH

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, June is ALS Awareness Month. Friends, families and supporters of those with ALS dedicate June to raise awareness of this devastating disease and raise funds for a cure.

The cornflower is the official emblem of ALS. Despite its fragile appearance, it is a hearty flower found throughout Canada. Like the cornflower, people with ALS show remarkable strength in coping with this devastating and fatal disease.

The ALS Society of Canada is the only national voluntary health organization dedicated solely to the fight against ALS, or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease. The society funds ALS research and works to improve the quality of life for Canadians affected by this fatal disease. Imagine not being able to walk, talk or eat, yet people's minds remain intact and their senses unaffected. This is what happens to over 3,000 Canadians with this disease.

It is dedicated volunteers like Bobbi Greenberg in my riding of Richmond Hill who make a difference in the lives of those with the disease and their families.

* * *

ACTS OF HEROISM

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to tell members about three brave young men from my constituency. On the night of April 11, Devin Knot, Brett Opikokew and Joshua Lasas, all from Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan, were driving home from a hockey game when they spotted a minivan in a ditch.

Statements by Members

Upon getting out of their own vehicle to investigate, they heard the screams of children. The minivan had begun to sink into deep, freezing water and they could hear the occupants trapped inside. Without regard for their own safety, each of these young men entered the freezing water and each was able to bring a small child to safety. All three children saved were under the age of eight. The children's mother was able to escape before the minivan submerged and the young men were able to help her as well.

It is with great pride that I recognize the heroic efforts of these young men. Their selfless actions saved four lives and their courage and humility will not soon be forgotten.

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[*Translation*]

GOVERNOR GENERAL OF CANADA

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on November 24, 2008, the Governor General of Canada, accompanied by her staff and a dozen or so delegates, took part in a state visit to Europe.

That tour through Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic resulted in a travel journal—a 100-page, full-colour book, printed on glossy, non-recycled paper. Several hundred copies were printed, all paid for by taxpayers' money. At a time when all governments around the world are talking about preserving the environment, and in these tough economic times, the Governor General of Canada has no problem wasting ink and paper on a travel journal, trying to convince us that her travels were essential for Canada.

It is unacceptable to see the Governor General of Canada, the representative of Queen Elizabeth II, behaving so irresponsibly at the expense of Canadian and Quebec families who pay her non-taxable salary and her operating budget, when they can barely make ends meet.

* * *

[*English*]

NATIONAL DAY OF RECONCILIATION

Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one year ago today, the Prime Minister stood in the House to apologize to aboriginal peoples for Canada's role in the Indian residential school system. This historic event began an era of reconciliation and repairing relationships with aboriginal peoples, and we will continue to work closely with them in a spirit of partnership and healing.

Yesterday, our government announced the new chair and commissioners for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. These appointments are a step forward and part of our commitment to delivering a fair and lasting resolution concerning residential schools. For true reconciliation and healing to happen, we must listen closely to the words spoken by former students and allow them the chance to share their stories.

Events are taking place today across the country to honour, educate and pay tribute to former residential school students, their families and their communities.

● (1410)

HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand today to condemn yesterday's shooting inside Washington's Holocaust Memorial Museum. This was a shameful act of an ignorant coward. The museum was filled with visitors, including schoolchildren. Only the courageous actions of Officer Stephen Tyrone Johns, who died heroically in the line of duty, and of the other security guards prevented a further loss of innocent lives.

With this attack on a living memorial to the Holocaust, the shooter tried to silence the truth. However, with his brazen act, the shooter brought into sharp focus the museum's purpose to confront hatred, prevent genocide, promote human dignity and strengthen democracy.

We need to educate our children on the lessons of the Holocaust and remember that those who do not learn from the past are condemned to repeat it. We must send a message to those who preach hate that we will not be cowed and intimidated in the face of bigotry.

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DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today over 100 Congolese men and women have gathered here to meet with parliamentarians. Many of them have experienced terrible violence and sexual abuse.

Women are subject to a horrific war where rape is a primary weapon. The unspeakable acts of sexual violence against women must stop in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Our government has contributed \$15 million over four years to the sexual violence project. This project will work with other international agencies, non-governmental organizations and the DRC. Our government's contribution is centred on two of the worst affected provinces in the DRC and will provide direct services to some 15,000 victims of sexual violence. The project responds to all facets of the problem: medical care, psychological support, socio-economic concerns and access to civilian justice.

We encourage all parties in the House to continue supporting the efforts of Canada's government in the fight against sexual violence.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the economy of northwestern Ontario has been hit especially hard during this economic crisis. Forestry, tourism and manufacturing enterprises have all struggled through this prolonged and deep recession. Given these challenges, the importance of the TTC-Bombardier streetcar proposal to Thunder Bay in northwestern Ontario cannot be overstated.

Statements by Members

Despite some recent complications on this file, I am hopeful the Minister of Transport will keep working with me and with his provincial and municipal counterparts toward a solution that will not just help the people of Toronto get the streetcars they need, but will also protect and create jobs in Thunder Bay and throughout northwestern Ontario.

The people and the economy of Thunder Bay and northwestern Ontario need the government to approve their share of the funding. I hope the Minister of Transport will do the right thing and make this deal happen before the June 27 deadline.

* * *

[Translation]

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the opposition leader wants to raise our taxes and put Quebec in its place and the Bloc wants to manufacture crises to break the nation apart, our government is making unprecedented efforts to stimulate the economy, create jobs and support those hardest hit by the global recession: the people of Canada.

In every region of Canada, families and businesses are paying less tax, unemployed workers are receiving enhanced benefits and training, and major job-creating projects are breaking ground. Thanks to our efforts, Canada continues to be in the strongest financial position of any G7 country. Experts such as the International Monetary Fund judge Canada's economic action plan to be a "timely, appropriately sized, diversified and well structured" response to the global recession.

I invite all my opposition colleagues to join us in these efforts, for which we are all responsible.

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NATIONAL DAY OF RECONCILIATION

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today is the national day of reconciliation marking the first anniversary of the government's apology to residential school students. Despite grand promises of reconciliation, the government remains unperturbed. What action has it taken in recent years to give credence to its apology? None.

Nothing has changed on native reserves. Rather than using its apology to open the door to a more promising future full of hope, the government has ignored the pressing needs of these communities. The government prefers to continue with its paternalistic approach and cares very little about the opinions of first nations and the impact of its decisions on them.

If the government is serious and wants to show its goodwill, it should ratify without delay the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

●(1415)

[English]

NATIONAL DAY OF RECONCILIATION

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one year ago today in this chamber, the Government of Canada and all political parties apologized for the tragedy of native residential schools. Throughout the day, ceremonies and speeches have been held in Ottawa and throughout Canada to mark June 11 as a day of reconciliation.

The apology marked a historic day, the end of a long campaign to get Canada to acknowledge the wrongs that were done to aboriginal children, families, communities and cultures, but it was not the end of the journey. Moving forward from the apology, first nations, Métis and Inuit people and all Canadians need truth, accountability, healing and reconciliation.

We must honour the words of last June 11 with positive action. Words cannot erase the wrongs that were done, but we can seize this opportunity to make real change in the lives of aboriginal people and communities.

We all recognize that we cannot change the past, but we can change the future and build a more just Canada, a fairer Canada, a greater Canada.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today our Prime Minister has informed Canadians that we have implemented 80% of this year's part of our two year economic action plan.

Because of our unprecedented action in every region of Canada, we are reducing the tax burden on families and businesses, we are supporting Canadians who have lost their jobs and we are creating more jobs.

This is in very sharp contrast to the Liberal leader's plan to raise taxes. The Leader of the Liberal Party announced a few months ago that he "will have to raise taxes". This is in addition to his promise to impose a job-killing carbon tax and increase the GST.

Canadians do not want that. That is why they trust our Conservative government to manage the economy.

Because of our government's management of the economy, we have managed to retain the smallest deficit and debt compared to GDP of any country in the G7. Canada's economic action plan is internationally recognized as the right response to the global recession to help Canadian families and emerge from the recession.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

MEDICAL ISOTOPES

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians just cannot believe it. Their frustration is growing with each passing day as they observe this government's incompetence in handling this health crisis.

Why has the Prime Minister reacted to this crisis by shrugging his shoulders, disappointing everyone, abandoning the Canadian isotope industry and completely shirking his responsibilities?

[*English*]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2008, AECL made the decision to discontinue the MAPLE-1 and MAPLE-2 reactors, which were to supply medical isotopes to the world. It was after 12 years, over half a billion dollars, and not one single medical isotope produced.

As a result of that, the government instructed AECL to extend the licence of the NRU as best it could in order to continue to produce medical isotopes. Along with that, last week we struck an expert panel to review other options that may be made available. That is indeed what we are doing.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one-third of all hospital patients in this country rely on nuclear medicine.

In January, senior officials warned the minister that disease trends, the health needs of our aging population and the lack of effective alternatives will drive up the future demand for medical isotopes. Conservatives refused to convene an international panel to reassess the MAPLEs reactors, even though they renewed the MAPLEs' licence in 2007 because they do produce isotopes.

In fact, some experts believe options exist that could see the MAPLEs on line in as little as two months. Why not?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question, but after reading his statements in committee and after hearing him today, I can say that he is incorrect on the facts.

The reality is that an expert panel and experts did review the MAPLEs in 2003. That is exactly the point in time when the Liberals were in government. That is when the member for St. Paul's was the minister of state for public health and would have been made aware of the issues surrounding the MAPLEs and the decisions that would be going forward.

The most important thing for Canadians to understand is that all avenues were exhausted with respect to coming to the decision to discontinue the MAPLEs.

* * *

• (1420)

HEALTH

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let the minister tell that to the patients who are waiting for their cancer tests; look them in the eye and tell them that.

Oral Questions

The World Health Organization has declared the global H1N1 outbreak a pandemic. This is the first global flu epidemic in 41 years. Since May, Manitoba has repeatedly offered its help to plan for a possible pandemic in aboriginal communities. The government did not step up to respond.

With lives already lost, what concrete plan does the government have to prepare all aboriginal communities for this global pandemic, and why has there been such a delay in response?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2007, we developed a pandemic plan for this country, and we are implementing and working with that plan, which includes first nations communities.

As for Manitoba, I have an excellent working relationship with the Minister of Health in Manitoba. We are in constant communication with the communities impacted, and we are assisting them with additional resources as necessary as we deal with this situation.

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MEDICAL ISOTOPES

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, only months ago the minister said that the opposition was fearmongering when it raised the issue of heavy water leaks and the effects on isotope production at Chalk River. Then, she dismissed concerns that isotope production was unreliable.

The crisis has now hit Canadian patients and their families. They want answers. What is our current total supply of isotopes per day? What is Canada's current daily requirement for isotopes? Can the minister guarantee to fully make up the shortfall?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as is known by the House, there are five reactors in the world that can produce medical isotopes. One of them is the NRU here in Canada, which actually produced up to 30% of the global isotopes.

While we have had discussions with the other countries, and indeed Petten in the Netherlands has increased by 50%, and South Africa has increased by 30%, the reality is there is a shortage of isotopes in this country.

That is why the Minister of Health is working with her colleagues in the provinces and the territories and in the medical establishment in order to mitigate the shortage of supply.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, she did not answer my questions.

Diagnostic tests have been cut back by 95% at Verdun Hospital and 85% at Saint-Jérôme Hospital. Dr. François Lamoureux said, "This week has been a catastrophe..."

Oral Questions

What is the current state of our daily supply of isotopes? What quantity of isotopes do we need on a daily basis? Can the minister guarantee that she will be able to supply the difference? Canadians want answers.

[English]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a very serious issue. The shortage of medical isotopes is understandably of concern to many Canadians.

Contingency measures ensure that the supply of isotopes is targeted at patients most at risk, such as children. Supplies will vary throughout time depending on what global reactors are available to supply isotopes. There is no doubt that patients will be impacted.

Our government is exhausting every available means to mitigate and, above all, resolve the situation. We continue to identify alternatives to the provinces and territories.

* * *

[Translation]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative economic action plan, backed by the Liberals, is clearly inadequate and insufficient for Quebec. The action plan update the Prime Minister has just presented with such pomp and circumstance is proof of this.

Since some of the projects coming under the 2007 infrastructure budget have not even started yet, is it not clear that very few of the projects planned under the 2009 budget have yet got under way?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are working very hard with our Quebec colleagues to ensure that jobs are created with our infrastructure investments.

It can be seen in the report released a few hours ago, that \$210 million is going to small Quebec communities, \$200 million to major cities, and \$11 million to a project in Quebec City. There is a lot of good news for Quebec, with lots more to come.

• (1425)

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' economic action plan is a total flop. I am sure that their good news is not so good for the unemployed, whose numbers increase daily. The deficit is growing every day as well. We have no choice but to refuse to vote funding for this inadequate plan.

Why is the Prime Minister not instead taking inspiration from the Bloc Québécois recovery plan, which proposes the support to the manufacturing and forestry sectors that the regions are waiting for, as well as improvements to employment insurance?

If he wants to debate about the regions of Quebec, we are ready for that any time. We are waiting for him.

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a global recession. Canada has an action plan that is admired around the world. It is one of the largest action plans in the G7. We have had the cooperation of the provinces and the territories in creating additional stimulus.

I am proud to tell the House that 80% of the projects are being implemented now, within 10 weeks of the budget having been passed.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when giving his update, the Prime Minister himself admitted that changes needed to be made to the employment insurance system and that he would announce them in the fall. The Prime Minister does not understand that unemployed workers need help now.

Does the Prime Minister not understand that it is irresponsible to wait until the fall to improve accessibility to employment insurance and increase benefits and enhancements, which a number of stakeholders have long been calling for?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think that the Bloc Québécois members are not following the news. This week, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation said it expected housing starts to continue improving in Canada, both for single family homes and for multiple dwellings.

Why? Why is the economy improving? Because we have invested \$12 billion in infrastructure. We are giving people a \$1,350 renovation credit. That is how we are making progress.

I do not understand why they are voting against that. How can they be opposed to the fact that we are helping Canadians?

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and his minister are trying to fool the public by implying that all unemployed workers have already benefited from the five extra weeks of benefits announced in the budget. Only a minority has been able to benefit, whereas abolishing the waiting period would have benefited all people who lose their jobs.

Why not abolish the waiting period now, which would help the unemployed right away and put money into the economy?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will quote from another article. According to the OECD, the crisis is slowing in many countries. The OECD says:

...indicators for April 2009 point to a reduced pace of deterioration in most of the OECD economies with stronger signals...in Canada...

Our measures are paying off. We have given people five more weeks of EI benefits, where the Bloc suggested only two. Our measures to improve employment insurance total \$7.3 billion in 2008-09. That is what we—

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

INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister seems to have donned his rose-coloured glasses once again. He said that there would be no recession and no deficit—turns out he was wrong about that—and now he is saying, quite seriously, that the work has been done and everything is hunky dory. But the truth is that infrastructure projects are not moving forward.

Should we ask the mayors why so many projects have been announced, yet all the construction sites are empty?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite takes the time to read the update that was tabled in the House today, he will see the chart about real GDP growth and he will see what the private sector economists are saying in this country. He will also read what the OECD has been saying about this country and what the IMF has been saying about this country.

Canadians can be proud of the economic action plan, and they can be proud of the thousands of projects that are going forward and being implemented all across this country from coast to coast.

• (1430)

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, holding some kind of weird Mike Duffy live show instead of reporting to the House will not change the facts.

The fact is that the money is not flowing. The minister should not ask me. He should ask the mayors. At the FCM convention in Whistler, they were very clear on this.

The mayor of Kitchener said that most stimulus projects are still waiting for approval. The mayor of Toronto added that although there have been announcements, very little money has hit the ground.

How can the Prime Minister claim the job is done when very little money has actually—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transport.

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he came up to thank me for the great projects we announced on Friday in the province of Ontario.

The president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities said this week, “The minister showed a commitment to cooperation and flexibility that will help keep the economic stimulus plan moving forward, create new jobs, and invest in the foundation of our economy and the quality of life”.

We announced in the province of Ontario just last week more than \$3.4 billion worth of projects: a lot of jobs, a lot of hope, a lot of opportunity. The only thing standing in the way is the negativism of the NDP.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is holding some kind of gong show outside of the House of Commons instead of being here to answer questions.

He had the gall to slap a windmill on his propaganda. Is that some kind of joke? A windmill? This is on the day when we learn from

Oral Questions

this infamous tape from the Minister of Natural Resources that the money earmarked to support wind energy was transferred, guess where: no surprise, to the oil patch. A billion dollars intended for wind power goes into the tar sands.

Can the environment minister tell us how he was able to transfer a billion dollars from what should be happening, wind power, to what should not be happening: more tar sands projects without controls?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, you should tell the hon. member that what should not be happening is the nonsense he is spreading in the House of Commons. That is what should not be happening.

Canada is a world leader, and 73% of our electricity system is non-emitting in terms of carbon dioxide. In the last throne speech we set an objective of achieving 90% non-emitting.

Canada will have one of the cleanest electricity systems in the world, and we are investing in excess of \$200 million in this technology fund, including in wind energy.

That is what is happening, not what the hon. member is spreading in the House.

* * *

[Translation]

MEDICAL ISOTOPES

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are appalled at the isotope shortage and they have a lot of questions.

Can the government tell Canadians how much it will cost to buy isotopes on the international market? Will the government compensate the provinces for this additional cost?

[English]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are working closely with the provinces and territories, and the medical community who are implementing the contingency measures to manage the situation.

Our focus at this point is to increase timely access to the available supply of medical isotopes and alternatives. I am in regular conversations with my provincial and territorial counterparts on this issue.

Our government will continue to work in partnership with the provinces and the medical community to do what is best for Canadians.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, these are straightforward questions and Canadians are entitled to straight answers.

So let us try again. Does the government expect to see a bidding war for the dwindling supply of global isotopes? Is it not reasonable to expect that most of the remaining supply of cancer testing isotopes is going to be soaked up by the U.S. market?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we indicated yesterday through our conversations with the United States, the Minister of Health is working with the distributors of generators.

Oral Questions

We do know that next week we will have 50% of the supply that we normally have in isotopes here in Canada and that has been communicated to the medical community.

As well, as the hon. member knows because he has been on the committee, it is a very complex chain in which we have isotopes coming from global reactors into the Canadian marketplace. We are working with all the parties involved in that supply chain.

• (1435)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today and every week day in Canada three families will sit in their doctor's office and be told that their child has cancer.

Some 850 children are diagnosed every year and 135 will die. The parents will be told that the prognosis and treatment will depend on the results of a bone scan. Bone scans for children require technetium-99. There is no safe alternative.

Will the minister guarantee that the children with cancer will get the scans they need when they need them?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are working very closely with the medical isotopes experts on this issue. We are looking at identifying alternatives which have already been identified and are on the market, and are available for use by the provinces and territories. When we are dealing with a small supply of medical isotopes, it is very important to manage one's cases with one's patients and examine what options are available as alternatives.

That is the information we have provided to the provinces and territories, and to care providers in the provinces.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister has to stop misleading Canadians. There is no plan.

In the very guidelines that her department released on May 20 it states, "Any bone scan for newly diagnosed or established pediatric cancers since there is no alternative to TC99 bone scans for the pediatric patients in the event of a shortage".

Again, there are no safe alternatives.

As the supply dries up, how will the minister assure the parents of sons or daughters who have cancer that they will get the treatment and the tests that they need when they need them?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is so very important when we are dealing with a serious issue like this, to ensure that accurate information is being provided to the provinces and territories. It is a concern that many people share and it is important that the member communicate that there are alternatives that are available now.

With regard to Tc99, my colleague has mentioned there will be 50% of the supply in this country this week. Therefore, it is important that the individual communicate that there is some supply. There is a shortage, but there are also alternatives.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the medical isotope crisis is getting worse. Both doctors and their patients are worried. Dr. François Lamoureux, president of Quebec's association of nuclear medicine specialists, denounced the govern-

ment's inaction and said that this situation was foreseeable. There is a shortage of medical isotopes in the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region, Sherbrooke, Saint-Jérôme, Joliette, Quebec City, Montreal and Trois-Rivières—in short, everywhere.

When will the Prime Minister ask his Minister of Natural Resources to resign?

[*English*]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think it is really important to take a very clear look at this situation.

The reactor is on an extended safe shutdown for the reasons that it is unsafe to operate. It was something that could not be anticipated nor predicted. Indeed, this reactor has been producing reliably over 90% for the last number of years.

Indeed, there was another alternative in MAPLE-1 and MAPLE-2. It was cancelled in 2008 because it did not produce a single isotope. As indicated before—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Trois-Rivières.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this minister leaves documents behind, puts her colleagues down and cares more about advancing her career than about her files. She has no credibility left when it comes to dealing with such a serious crisis. The Prime Minister is too proud to put the health of countless patients ahead of political partisanship.

Will he finally behave like a real Prime Minister, replace his minister and see to it himself that this issue is dealt with?

• (1440)

[*English*]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government has been working very diligently on this matter since December and indeed back to November of 2007.

Difficult decisions were taken in not continuing on with MAPLE-1 and MAPLE-2, but it was the right decision to make. In lieu of that, we decided to pursue an extension of the licence of the reactors that could continue to produce.

Again, we are faced with difficult decisions, but we also have a plan. We have contingency plans that are in place with the Minister of Health and we are seeking the globe to help us produce more medical isotopes, and it is working.

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, another scientific report has found that climate change will displace millions of people because of rising sea levels. Canada and Quebec will not be spared, since we have massive coastlines and we will receive climate-change refugees.

Oral Questions

Given the scope of this impending disaster, will the Minister of the Environment adopt a responsible attitude and put an end to the constant sabotage of environmental meetings?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our position has not changed. The realistic target for Canada is a 20% reduction in carbon dioxide emissions compared to 2006 by 2020.

Our plan is adapted to the realities of Canada's industry, climate and geography. It is also adapted to Quebec's reality.

Mr. Gérard Asselin (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this phenomenon is not limited to Europe and Asia. Climate change will also accelerate erosion of the coasts of the St. Lawrence gulf and estuary. The federal government, which still has no credible plan to fight climate change, is now responsible for the consequences of its failure to act.

Does the minister plan to create a compensation fund to give Quebec the means to finance measures to slow shoreline erosion?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish the opposition would stop playing petty politics and get behind us. For instance, I would remind the House about wind energy. Yesterday we outlined the regulatory framework for the carbon exchange system. This system is very important for Quebec and the Montreal stock exchange. Yesterday's announcement concerning the offset system is a clear sign to the rest of the world of our commitment to fight climate change.

* * *

[English]

MEDICAL ISOTOPES

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if I am a person affected by cancer, I want to know how all this will affect me.

The minister tells us that next week we will receive over 50% of our orders. Which means that next week we will also not receive nearly 50% of our orders. If I am a cancer patient, what does that mean for me?

She said the Dutch are increasing production by 50%, the South Africans by 30%, and the Australians ramping up sooner. Forget the dispute over numbers. Take their numbers. Will that help get to me? How soon? What does that mean for me?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in terms of the increases in both the Petten reactor and the South African reactor, it is indeed based on those increases that we are able to say that we are receiving 50% of the orders next week. It has trickled through. We are going to be receiving technetium generators from those global operators in Canada and we will continue to work with the global reactors in order to do so.

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if I am that person at home, that does not answer my question.

The minister talks about all she is doing. The Minister of Health talks about using alternative treatments. They make it sound as if one plus the other is the answer, not just the best answer they have but the full answer for me, the patient.

However, the medical experts tell us in spite of what they are doing, we have a crisis, that the one plus one of the ministers does not equal two. And I, as the cancer patient at home, have to live in the shortfall. As that patient, tell me, tell me where I stand?

● (1445)

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the medical experts have provided alternative options that are available for physicians. Of the alternatives that are available now, over 50% of the Tc99 isotopes are for heart scans, and thallium can be used as an alternative in many of these cases. The next largest use of Tc99 isotopes is for bone scanning. Again, there is an alternative, sodium fluoride, which is available now. We have approved clinical trials and special access program requests. This provides Canadians with greater access to alternatives.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister talks about thallium as an option. We have learned today that the supply of thallium is running out. At Brantford General Hospital, 75 patients right now are waiting for the tests that they need.

I want to ask the minister a simple question. What is her plan and when is she going to release the plan to enable Canadians to have access to isotopes and the thallium that they need for the tests that they require to save their lives?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Lantheus has publicly announced that it is able to meet the thallium demands for all Canadians. I understand it has been in contact with other suppliers, as well as hospitals, as to how it could provide assistance. I encourage both private suppliers, as well as hospitals, to work together to ensure a steady supply of thallium.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the House and the Canadian public have no idea from the government what the shortfall is or what the costs are. There is no plan from the government. On top of that, the government closed down what the National Academy of Sciences said was the only real solution to deal with the isotope crisis and that was keeping MAPLE-1 and MAPLE-2 open.

Why is the government not producing the solutions and the plans for the Canadian public? Why is it so incompetent? This gets to the heart of competence to be able to save the lives of Canadians and it is failing.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, when the hon. member said that Canadians did not want more rhetoric, I thought he actually meant it. What we are having now is a lot of rhetoric.

AECL has world class scientists who worked for 12 years to get the MAPLEs reactors working. After 12 years and over \$.5 billion not one single isotope was actually produced.

There was also careful deliberation by American and Argentinian experts and it was fully studied by the panel. Indeed, the key for this is that the minister of natural resources for five of these 12 years was the member for Wascana.

*Oral Questions***THE ECONOMY**

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the Liberal leader went to Cambridge and said, “We will have to raise taxes”, our Prime Minister went to the city of Cambridge today to tell Canadians that we have lowered their taxes and we have a plan to protect Canada's economy during the global economic downturn, a plan that we have been aggressively implementing.

Can the finance minister update the House on how far we have come in implementing our plan?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly can. After 10 weeks, we have about 80% of the measures and initiatives in the plan being implemented across Canada. This is a vast set of aggressive initiatives being implemented in record time, an unprecedented accomplishment by the public service in co-operation with the provinces and territories across the country that understand the need for this stimulus activity for these thousands of projects. I only hope the opposition can also understand.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today marks the first anniversary of the apology to students of Indian residential schools. Sadly, since that historic day, little has changed for aboriginal peoples. Many still live in overcrowded housing, have little access to proper medical care and violence against indigenous women is increasing. Most symbolic, the Conservative government still refuses to sign the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

When will the government's actions match the apology? When will it act to meet the basic human rights of first peoples?

• (1450)

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to be on my feet today on this important day of national reconciliation to encourage people to look at pages 120 to 122 of the latest report by the finance minister, in which we detail over 13 schools and 18 first nations water and waste water projects that have been announced this year alone.

In the first budget, the minister brought in \$300 million for market housing, \$300 million for housing in the north and \$400 million for off-reserve housing. Then in the last budget, there was more, with \$200 million more for housing and more money for off-reserve.

We are getting the job done.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today the World Health Organization announced H1N1 as a full-blown pandemic. In Manitoba over half of the people in intensive care are aboriginal, many from Nunavut.

The government insists that H1N1 affects all Canadians equally, even after the WHO and Manitoba's medical officer agreed that it

was hitting aboriginal Canadians the hardest. Of course it is. Garden Hill, a community that I represent with two cases confirmed already, still lacks face masks and hand sanitizers. This is a catastrophe.

When will the government implement—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, we have a plan and we are implementing that plan in partnership with the provincial health ministry. This morning I had a conversation with Minister Oswald. We are working together in addressing the community issues.

What the member should be explaining to her constituents and the first nations community is why she voted against \$400 million that increased the capacity for health care delivered in our budget.

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[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the cat was let out of the bag yesterday. The Minister of Natural Resources stated that the Minister of the Environment had redirected monies earmarked for the wind sector to the oil sector. How shameful!

Will the Minister of the Environment confirm his colleague's statements?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not the case. Yesterday, I made an announcement with regard to this subject that is very important to the Bloc. The opposition is again headed in the wrong direction. Fortunately, we are here. Yesterday's announcement of an offset credit system is an important step in developing an emissions trading system in line with the international system. We are taking steps in the right direction and the Bloc's support for this is very important.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have one thing to say to the minister. When funds are earmarked for wind power, Quebecers expect that they will go to wind power and not be used by the government's friends, the oil companies,

I will turn to the Minister of Natural Resources. Did she state on tape that her colleague redirected funds earmarked for renewable energy to the oil industry?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not the case. I invited my colleague to a number of international conferences. I also asked him to study the Alberta tar sands. He has always refused. He prefers to remain sitting on his hands in the House of Commons.

It is obvious that the Bloc is not behind the environment.

*Oral Questions***FINANCE**

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the budget report card states clearly that the Canadian secured credit facility has already provided \$11 billion in funding, yet the man in charge of this program told the Standing Committee on Finance today that not one cent has so far been paid out.

Can the minister explain this huge contradiction, an \$11 billion contradiction?

• (1455)

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all of the pieces of the extraordinary financing framework are in place. Credit is flowing. In fact, because of the actions of the government, we have been able to drive down mortgage rates in the country. Residential mortgage rates are at their lowest level since the second world war, and that makes a difference. We are now seeing that stimulus create demand for housing, which means jobs in our country.

This is the economic action plan. This is what it accomplishes.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, according to the president of BDC, not a penny has been paid out.

Americans can go online and find, for example, that the U.S. stimulus has created 40,000 actual jobs in Oklahoma, or spent an additional actual \$25 billion paving roads.

Rather than feeding Canadians meaningless weasel words like “commitments” and “implementation”, could the minister follow Obama's example and tell Canadians how much money has actually gone out the door and how many jobs have actually been created?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are actually ahead of President Obama in our economic action plan. January 27 was the day they sponsored it.

On job creation, using the calculations of the FCM, or the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, at \$1 billion and 11,000 jobs, given what has flowed so far, that is 132,000 jobs. Not only that, there are 120,000 jobs being protected by work-share. That is over 200,000 already this year, which is more than we said we would do in the economic action plan.

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ASBESTOS INDUSTRY

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, more Canadians die from asbestos than from all other occupational diseases combined, yet Canada continues to be one of the largest producers and exporters of asbestos in the world. We will not use it ourselves, yet we dump over 200,000 tonnes per year into underdeveloped nations.

Without exaggeration, we are exporting human misery on a monumental scale. Canada's asbestos policy is morally and ethically reprehensible. How, in all good conscience, can the Minister of Natural Resources continue to promote and subsidize this deadly industry?

[Translation]

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the policy is clear and remains unchanged. The safe use of chrysotile fibre is being promoted, here in Canada and everywhere else in the world. It is false to say that the industry is being subsidized. The Chrysotile Institute is mandated by the federal government, the Government of Quebec and the union of chrysotile workers to promote its safe use, here in Canada and internationally.

[English]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is no safe use of asbestos and anybody who watched the CBC last night knows how Canadian asbestos is actually used overseas and abroad. Most of the workers we saw on that broadcast will be dead in 10 years and we are contaminating an entire subcontinent with a legacy of asbestos-related disease.

Virtually every developed nation has banned asbestos in all of its forms. When will the minister wake up and realize that the government's continued support of the asbestos industry is fundamentally wrong? Does the Minister of Natural Resources not think that it is sexy enough to get involved with?

[Translation]

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we must not make blanket statements here. Some uses of asbestos in the past were not appropriate, sprayed asbestos for instance. We know that these uses are dangerous. We are talking about risk management here. To that end, promotion in Canada and internationally of the safe use of asbestos is being carried out on behalf of the government of Quebec and the federal government, as well as the workers in the industry. This is a policy they have developed, and they are the experts. We must not generalize and we must not throw out the baby with the bathwater.

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[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one year ago today, our Prime Minister gave a full, sincere and meaningful apology on behalf of a nation for the sad legacy of residential schools. From 1920 to 1996, more than 150,000 first nation, Inuit and Métis children, including my own grandparents, were removed from their families and placed in residential schools across Canada. The impact is still felt today.

One year later could the Minister of Indian Affairs tell us what this truly means and what we are doing to address the real concerns and challenges that aboriginal people face today?

Business of the House

•(1500)

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think all of us were very proud and pleased to hear the apology in the last Parliament. It was probably one of the finest moments in that Parliament.

Our government is conscious of the real challenges that aboriginal people face. That is why I was pleased yesterday to announce the commissioners for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. That is why we have taken practical steps. As I mentioned earlier, we have made investments in housing, in safe drinking water, skills development and so on.

As the national chief said a few moments ago on the front steps, we need to work in partnership with first nations and aboriginal people because we are all in this together.

* * *

[Translation]

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, a hundred Congolese women are visiting Parliament. The war in the Congo has been called a war on women. During the civil war, tens of thousands of women—mothers, daughters and grandmothers—have been systematically raped. One year ago, the UN asked Canada to take command of a peace mission in the Congo, but the Conservative government refused. That was when Robert Fowler asked the question that I am about to ask again.

Why has Canada abandoned its role as an international peace-maker?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is mistaken. His information is incorrect. We have worked and are working with other countries like Canada to bring peace and stability to that country. We have intervened to stop violence against women and find a way to bring peace to the region. We are taking action to ensure the well-being of the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

* * *

LOBSTER INDUSTRY

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the announcements made yesterday by the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to help the lobster industry do not cut it. Lobster fishers are saying the plan is vague and ill-suited to their needs. Furthermore, it provides one-time assistance only. There was no mention of how much of the money will go to fishers in Quebec or of any adjustments to the EI system.

Can the minister tell us if she will take into account the efforts already made by lobster fishers in Quebec to conserve the resource, and ensure that assistance measures will be appropriate, adequate and stable for Quebec?

[English]

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday it was a pleasure to announce \$65 million in support for the lobster industry. That \$65 million includes Quebec.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the House would be curious to know the work program that the government House leader has in mind for the balance of this week and next week.

I would like to raise four quick points. First of all, in response to his questions last week about Bill C-29, farm loans, and Bill C-33, veterans allowances, I can confirm that I have spoken to Senate colleagues and they expect a very expeditious process in the other place to bring those two items to a successful conclusion.

Second, I am sure the government House leader will want to take the opportunity to designate the two remaining days in the supply period so we will know exactly when they come next week.

Third, the Prime Minister has mentioned the conferring of honorary Canadian citizenship on the Aga Khan. That idea was very well received when it was mentioned in the House. No specific steps have yet been taken on implementation, and I wonder if there is a plan to proceed by unanimous consent on this matter before the end of next week.

Finally, the Maa-nulth treaty in British Columbia needs a ways and means motion and implementing legislation. The government House leader knows that the official opposition is supportive of this implementation. I wonder, again, if there is a plan to proceed by unanimous consent to make sure that treaty is implemented promptly, especially on this national reconciliation day.

•(1505)

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to be able to respond to not just the regular Thursday question about the business of the House for the next week, but indeed to respond to all the questions from my colleague across the way.

In the order that we will be dealing with it, today we are debating a motion from the New Democratic Party, which has its supply day today.

Tomorrow we will continue, and hopefully conclude, the third reading stage of Bill C-6, product safety, followed by Bill C-36, the faint hope bill. The backup bill tomorrow will be Bill C-19, the anti-terrorism bill.

Monday, June 15 and Friday, June 19, 2009 shall be allotted days.

On Monday, we will be introducing a bill regarding the Maa-nulth First Nations agreement. It is my intention, provided that I have an agreement from all the other parties, to call and complete that bill on Tuesday. On behalf of that first nation, I express my appreciation to all hon. members and all the parties in the House.

Next week, I will also call Bill C-26, auto theft, for report and third reading. My hope is that we will get that down the hall to get it dealt with at the Senate.

In addition to Bill C-26, we will also consider Bill C-36, the faint hope bill; Bill C-37, National Capital Act; Bill C-38, Nahanni; and Bill C-31, modernizing criminal procedure. All of these bills, as we know, are at second reading.

I am hoping that Bill S-4, identity theft, can be sent over from the Senate expeditiously. If and when it arrives, I will be seeking the cooperation of the opposition to try to expedite that bill in our Chamber.

I might add that despite the assurance of the hon. opposition House leader last week, after we had passed Bill C-33 at all stages, the bill that will extend benefits to allied veterans and their families, I expected the Senate to quickly follow suit. Although sad, it is true that time is running out for some of these veterans and their families. They are waiting to receive these benefits. This bill is not controversial, but the delay of this bill by Liberal senators will become controversial very quickly.

Last week I also mentioned Bill C-29 in my Thursday reply, which the hon. member for Wascana mentioned a minute ago. That is the agricultural loans bill, which will guarantee an estimated \$1 billion in loans over the next five years to Canadian farm families and cooperatives. Today the Liberal senators did not grant leave to even consider the bill, let alone agree to adopt it.

Another week has come and gone. I am not sure how the member for Wascana intends to return to farm families in Saskatchewan and explain why his senators in the other place are delaying the passage of Bill C-29.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, let me just repeat for the benefit of the government House leader that the senators have both of those pieces of legislation clearly on their radar screen, and they will be dealt with expeditiously.

I wonder, though, if he would answer the one other point that I raised in my original question, and that is with regard to the government's plan with respect to proceeding by unanimous consent on honorary citizenship for the Aga Khan.

Hon. Jay Hill: First of all, Mr. Speaker, with regard to bills C-33 and C-29, which I just mentioned, I would point out that with the cooperation of all parties in this chamber we dealt very expeditiously with those pieces of legislation, both for our veterans and for our farmers. I do not see any reason that the Senate could not have had those passed, at a minimum for royal assent tonight when other bills will receive royal assent by the Governor General.

As to the honorary citizenship for the Aga Khan, certainly I will be returning in due course to the chamber, and negotiations will take place with all the parties. As the Prime Minister would say, I would expect and hope there will be rapid cooperation on that issue from all members.

Business of Supply

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1510)

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—PENSIONS

The House resumed consideration of the motion and of the amendment.

The Speaker: Order. When the motion was last debated in the House, the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour had the floor for questions and comments, consequent on his speech. There are five minutes remaining in the time allotted for questions and comments.

The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when we look at the facts, I think we have to conclude that the former government, in 1997, was correct to raise the contributions to the CPP, but the investment board idea was probably not such a good plan.

The Canada Pension Plan Investment Board was incorporated as a federal crown corporation by an act of Parliament in December 1997 and made its first investment in March 1999. As of March 31, 2009, the fund is currently at \$105.5 billion.

When the Liberals set up the board, they told Canadians we could make higher returns on our savings in the CPP if we were to invest in the stock market and in private investments instead of government bonds. That has not worked out so well.

In 2008, the CPP lost \$23.6 billion. In fact, the annualized rate of return since these great investment geniuses took over 10 years ago is only 4.3%.

That 4.3% has amounted to a total benefit of \$23.8 billion over the past 10 years. Had the money simply been left in long-term government bonds, the fund would have been \$13 billion more if they had left the whole thing alone in the first place. Without the fund, the plan would have earned \$36.5 billion, as I said, \$13 billion more.

The question is why not simply get rid of the board, go back to where we were before, and save \$300,000 to \$400,000 in salaries plus all these bonuses, the \$7 million in bonuses that are paid on an annual basis? Why are we doing that? Why do we not simply go back to where we were in 1997?

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the reason we would not want to go back to 1997 is that we might not have the CPP today if the government had not stepped in and done something about it.

At the time, it was not an easy decision. We could talk about the returns that have been year to year, but back in 1997 we were in desperate trouble. Canadians today would have had a lot less money to look forward to in their retirement years.

Business of Supply

I commend Prime Minister Chrétien and Finance Minister Martin and the others. The member does not have to take my word for it. The Caledon Institute, which I am sure my colleague knows well, which does tremendous work, said in its report that this huge reduction in poverty among seniors is due largely to improvements in public pension programs, including OAS and GIS but also the Canada and Quebec pension plans.

I think it was a very positive thing for Canadians that we did that. It provided a basis for some financial foundation today in spite of the difficult markets and difficult circumstances that Canadians are facing.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague speak about the dire situation in which seniors find themselves today. I am sure we can all relate to horrific stories that we hear from our constituents, especially our seniors who are finding it very hard to make ends meet, whether it is to put oil in their furnaces, food on their tables, to pay for their medications, or having to decide which one in fact they are going to spend their money on.

I ask my colleague what recommendations he would make and what kinds of programs he thinks we should institute to try to help our seniors through these very difficult times.

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the concern she has for seniors in her own riding. There are a lot of people in Canada, and around the world, who are looking at the issue of poverty and how it relates to seniors.

Our colleagues in the Senate have come out with a very excellent report entitled "Canada's Aging Population: Seizing the Opportunity". It has a number of recommendations, one of which says:

Current income security measures for our poorest seniors are not meeting their basic needs.

As much as OAS and GIS are an improvement over what we had before, they do not even meet the poverty line. The alternative federal budget had some ideas about the GIS. We have heard in our committee from seniors. I talked about CARP, and the work that Susan Eng and her group have done. Many seniors across the country have come to talk to us as we have travelled the country.

There are some things we can do. Housing is still a big issue among seniors. We need to invest in seniors housing. We need to make sure that we do something to solidify and strengthen private pension plans. That is a big issue for a lot of people. There is no question about that. I think that the single biggest thing for the poorest seniors is the need to increase the GIS.

As Liberals proposed during last year's election, we need to look at that GIS and make sure that all Canadian seniors who cannot go out and earn the money they are otherwise losing have the basic needs to lead a productive life in their senior years.

• (1515)

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate the acknowledgement. I congratulate my hon. colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

I would like to add that it certainly is a critical part of the debate to talk about the well-being of our seniors. Being from a riding in central Newfoundland where we have an aging population, I have an

above-average amount of seniors living in my riding. Because the area's true nature is certainly rural, we have people living in smaller communities spread out over a large geographic area. That boosts the cost of living for many of these seniors, certainly for travel and receiving primary health care.

First, I want to thank my colleague from the NDP for putting forward the motion we are debating today. In 2005, the Liberal Party brought forward changes to the Canada pension plan to ensure it remains well into the future. The Liberal Party also made positive changes to the guaranteed income supplement in 2005 that benefited single seniors by \$36 a month per person and \$58 a month per couple.

A lot has changed over the past four years. We have witnessed the price of home heating fuel and gasoline increase to the point where many seniors are currently finding it difficult in the winter months. I have heard many stories and I have personally witnessed seniors having to resort to turning off the heat in their homes on the cold winter days, some of them resorting to travelling to public areas simply because those areas have a far better heating system than what seniors can maintain in their own homes. When we travel to the local mall and hear a group of seniors say they are there because it is much warmer, we know we have a problem in this particular situation.

Canada is one of the richest countries in the world. It is sad when we see many of our seniors having to resort to taking those extreme measures. It really comes down to two choices: staying warm or putting food on the table. Many cannot afford both.

Our seniors, through their hard work, determination and self-preservation, built this country, and our generation in particular is in a position to help them live out their remaining years with dignity. What we have done to ensure this happens is of key importance to all of us in the House. Many are struggling at this point because of the higher cost of living. There is less money floating around in the economy. Therefore, it is hurting them in many, many ways.

It has been four years since they have seen any increase in the basic old age security and the guaranteed income supplement. It is about time the government stepped up to the plate and recognized the contribution of our seniors to this country by doing just that. It is one of the key elements of seniors policy and fiscal management that could be rectified in the near future.

Throughout my riding, and I am sure in every riding, there are seniors' homes that are filled with seniors who would much rather be living independently in their own homes. With their currently limited income through old age security and the GIS, they find that living in their homes is not always an option. Yet we as legislators allow the tax dollars of all Canadians to be used to supplement their stay in a seniors' complex. I would suggest that if we had foresight, we would pay our seniors more benefits through our social programs, therefore allowing more of them to stay in the homes of their choosing.

Business of Supply

I am convinced that if a thorough study were done today, the findings would be that the taxpayers, and subsequently the government, would save money in the long run, especially in this age when we have such an aging population.

There is another group of Canadians that we really need to take a look at in terms of negative impact on their income: the baby boomers, as we affectionately call them. They are now approaching, if not already into, their retirement years. Now that they are about to retire, or have already retired, when they turn 65 years of age and the old age security kicks in, their private or public pension is slashed, often to the point where their monthly income is substantially reduced. This is another issue that needs to be addressed and certainly needs to be studied over the coming years, if not months.

At this point I would like to provide an example to the House of just what I am talking about. A friend of mine whose name is Joan retired at 55 years of age, after working with the federal government for 32 years, and was in receipt of her superannuation. When she turned 65 years of age and was forced to take the basic old age security, her federal pension was cut by \$800 per month. The basic old age security is a little over \$500, and she had a net loss of \$300 per month.

• (1520)

The example I just gave the House is indeed true, for Joan and many others throughout this country who have experienced that, who have had so many years with the federal government. When an employee of the government or a private company pays into a pension plan for many years, they should be permitted to draw that pension in full until they are dead.

In the example I gave the House, the pensioner would have been \$300 per month better off if she could have retained her superannuation pension in full and was permitted to refuse the government's old age security pension. If she refused the OAS pension, her superannuation pension would still be cut by \$800 per month.

One sees the situation that we are in. The public system requires more compassion in order for people to have a decent income on which to live out their lives and to be independent if they so choose. We have a situation where we have to make these minor changes, and in some cases, major changes, in order for them to have a decent living.

The other issue, of course, would be from the private sector. I brought up an example two nights ago in the House. I talked about the situation of an individual who is less than the age of 55. He worked for years at the AbitibiBowater mill in Grand Falls-Windsor, which was recently closed. With the help of his union and through work of his own as a representative of the CEP union, he was able to negotiate an early retirement package that would have bridged him straight through to age 65.

However, because the company closed, he was laid off. Therefore, 10 years of his life was pulled away from him. As a result of the situation, he was laid off and he finds himself in an extremely precarious position where, because he is in an area of high unemployment, he has to travel away from his family or has to re-educate. If he is willing to re-educate, if he wants to go into another

career and desires to make a living doing something else, that is fine. The current programs do exist, albeit they could be improved.

However, what about those who choose not to do that? They are unable to move. They have larger families and they want to be home with their families. They do not want to be separated from their families. Alternatively, they are in a situation where all they need is for the government to give them assistance for a few years so that they are able to bridge through to their actual pension.

Therein lies a scenario that we have not discussed much in the House: pension bridging. There is a lot of talk going on in my riding now about pension bridging.

One of the topics we do not bring up when it comes to pension bridging is that it is a source of economic development for smaller communities. As my colleague from Newfoundland and Labrador can attest, economic development is a huge issue for the very reason that these are smaller communities attracting perhaps one or two major industries.

What does that have to do with economic development? In the case of pension bridging, people are kept in their own communities. It allows them to live there, with some assistance from the government and work as well, whether it be part time or reduced hours. By doing that, a particular community keeps its tax base. Therefore, that community is able to attract bigger industries to create employment.

If the town is depleted, how can it attract larger companies? Therein lies a situation of economic development when it pertains to the income of retired individuals or those who wish to partake in early retirement. We know the government has not given much lip service in the way of early retirement, but I think it is a frank discussion that the House should be having. We should be having it in all legislatures across this country.

Again, I congratulate my colleague for bringing this to the House as a point of debate. I think it is one that is crucial. I also notice that there is a lot of work that needs to be done on this in conjunction with the provinces. The provinces have chief control over many of the situations regarding pensions, certainly when it comes to bankruptcy, and in the private sector.

Therefore, we need to engage the two levels of government. We should have this conversation, whether it is through a summit or a first ministers conference. We should engage, but solely on this issue. Let us not open it up to every other issue across the board, whether it be equalization or anything of the sort, or God forbid, constitutional amendments.

• (1525)

Nonetheless, we should have this conversation when it comes to our seniors and how they are to bridge themselves from their employment into retirement years and ensure that the basic level of assistance is available for them to survive and to carry on with dignity.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when I spoke earlier, after the previous member for the Liberal Party, I was in fact telling him that the government did the correct thing back in 1995 when it increased the contributions to the pension plan.

Business of Supply

I was saying that the mistake at the time, as it turned out, was the investment board, and I asked the member to comment on that. At that time, markets were on the rise, and not only the federal government but also provincial governments were giving authority to their crown corporations to get into the equity side of things. That is something that had never happened before.

There have been rules on insurance companies over the years, which I think still exist. They are required to keep in fixed income investments a certain percentage of their funds, in fact, I think, all of their funds, to pay out claims. That is the way the world was up until that fateful time back in the period from 2005 to 2007, when the previous government set up this Canada Pension Plan Investment Board.

I was simply demonstrating to the other member that in fact, had we not set it up at all, we would have been \$13 billion better off. If we just left the money in guaranteed investments over that period of time, we would have received a better return by \$13 billion and not have had to set up the board and pay these excessive \$300,000 and \$400,000 salaries and \$7 million a year benefits to a group of financial geniuses who got only a 4.3% return over those 10 years.

I just want to ask the member whether he would agree with that.

I was certainly not criticizing the former Liberal government for increasing the contributions, because I think that was a very good thing for it to do and I really applaud it for that. However, it should not have set up this Canada Pension Plan Investment Board.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, first, I want to congratulate my hon. colleague who asked the question, because obviously he has done his homework on this issue. However, I am going to basically reiterate what my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour said, because I think it is the right answer to give under the context that we are in here.

We made significant investments to GIS. As I mentioned, some of the figures include a \$1.2 billion five-year investment. Also, on a specific level, there was a \$58 increase per couple and a \$36 increase for every individual.

I know he has mentioned that and he has acknowledged that. I just think we should acknowledge it again for the simple reason that it was a substantial investment back in the early part of this decade that I think the government on the other side has yet to acknowledge or yet to build upon itself.

That said, on his issue, what we did back then was make the system more solvent. Despite the increases he mentioned in CPP, what we had to do was overhaul the system to ensure that it remained solvent at that time.

We were the envy of the G8. As a matter of fact, we were considered admirable for what we were doing at the time, under the Chrétien government. We were also considered a model for other countries to follow in order to keep the system in place.

That is the issue here, because essentially down the road, with a burgeoning population, a very large part of the population now approaching senior years, if not already there, or as we call them, the baby boomers, we have to make a system that is solvent for them to

take advantage of and to attain that standard of living that they so desire, that they deserve.

Maybe that is the wrong expression to use, “that they desire”. They do deserve it for all those years of work. That is essentially the responsibility we have in this House as elected officials or elected members of Parliament, despite the fact that we come from different ideologies or from different party origins.

The other issue, too, that they bring up, and I want to reiterate this point, is about the re-engagement with the provinces in order to ensure that this is going to be a uniform, orderly way to transition into a more solvent and more generous pension plan for this entire country.

The scope of the federal government action is very limited in that respect. That is why I encourage the government to open that dialogue with the provinces and the provincial jurisdictions, as well as the territories.

• (1530)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

This motion, tabled by the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, speaks to the concerns of Canadians from all walks of life that the security they thought they would have in their retirement may be at risk, or worse, gone.

The motion supports expanding and increasing the CPP, old age security and the guaranteed income supplement to ensure a dignified standard of life for our seniors. It supports establishing an insurance program for workplace sponsored plans so that in the event of an economic downturn or some other financial crisis, as we are suffering today, workers' pensions would be protected. It makes the pensions of workers a priority. If a company becomes insolvent and declares bankruptcy, the promised pensions would be paid out before other creditors, including banks, before banks could deplete the remaining business assets.

This motion also addresses the Canada pension plan. It ensures that the directors of the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board ensure that their investments are sound, that the compensation is based on competitive rates across the industry rather than allowing for overly generous performance benefits, especially as the pension fund continues to lose money.

Why is this important for my province of Alberta?

Our seniors population has been growing steadily. Between 1974 and 2005, the number of Albertans over 65 years increased by 162%. In 2005, seniors comprised over 10.5% of our population. At present, one in ten Albertans is a senior. This number rises by 1,000 people per month. The total population of seniors is forecast to double in less than 20 years.

Coupled with this exponentially rising seniors population, we are faced with the economic recession. In Alberta, as with the rest of the country, we have experienced large job losses and with that, rising personal and business bankruptcies. The past mismanagement of the CPP has made matters worse.

Business of Supply

This motion tabled by my colleague presents solutions to address both the current problems faced by Canadians and reforms to avoid future challenges.

Why do New Democrats support expanding the CPP, old age security and the guaranteed income supplement? In Canada, the federal government provides two key supports for seniors: the old age security program and the guaranteed income supplement. These are not generous. They provide only a basic level of support premised on personal income, and where Canadians have been able to save for retirement, these benefits are further reduced.

In the past 15 years, the average pre-tax income of seniors families in Alberta increased by more than 27%. However, much of that growth was based on non-government sources, including RRSPs, RPPs and private investments such as stocks, bonds, mutual funds or T-bills.

In the good times, about 60% of seniors' average income came from sources not related to government transfers. The majority of this was from private pensions, employment earnings and investments. Approximately 62% of seniors had some form of private investment income. Almost 55% of seniors received income from other pensions outside of Canada pension plan or old age security benefits.

These sources served us well when the economy was strong. People could save and benefit from high interest rates. The stock market was bullish. Businesses were prospering, contributing to pension funds and paying out to retirees. In the past year, however, this has not been the case. Many people have lost their life savings as the markets have tumbled, leaving them without a cushion and reliant on government programs.

With a high proportion of Albertans reliant on private pensions outside of the CPP, the population is extremely vulnerable to market downturn. Because of this, we are also calling on the government to establish a self-financing pension insurance program to ensure the viability of workplace sponsored plans in tough economic times.

Canadian small businesses are the backbone of our economy. In fact, 98% of Canadian businesses are small businesses. They employ nearly half of our private sector workers. Small businesses are responsible for about 20% of all Canadian exports. They create employment, generate wealth, and serve as the anchors for our communities. In tough economic times, these businesses are suffering. Workers and the owners are left out in the cold when bankruptcies occur.

● (1535)

In Alberta, consumer bankruptcies jumped near 61% this past year. In Edmonton, sadly, one of the few growth industries now is bankruptcy trustees.

When businesses are forced to shut down and owners and workers lose their livelihoods, entire communities lose. Federal leadership is needed to work with the provinces to institute a pension insurance regime to ensure workers actually receive the retirement benefits they have earned, even if their employer goes out of business. Such a system could be funded by contributions from federal workplace pension plan sponsors, administered by the federal government and designed to ensure efficiency and fairness for all parties.

What happens when a business goes bankrupt and there are assets left? Should the managers continue to collect large bonuses while those who worked for years for that company are left without the pension they worked for and paid into?

We believe that workers' pension funds must go to the front of the line of creditors in the event of bankruptcy proceedings.

I know of a case personally where a couple moved into a new area which had grown up around a new company. They raised their family while dad went to work each day for 40 years until he retired. He worked hard and paid into his pension all his life. Sadly, shortly after retiring, he succumbed to cancer, leaving his wife behind to survive on his pension. Just a year later the company declared bankruptcy and the pension she had counted on could be gone. She could now lose her house. Is this fair? No.

It is for this reason that employee pension plans should come first. It is the workers who created the value of the company, and they should be first in line to receive a share of the benefits that their dedicated work produced.

Finally, we must ensure that the CPP Investment Board protects the CPP from imprudent investment practices. Measures are needed to ensure the board ends the practice of awarding managers performance-based bonuses. We need to take all necessary steps to recover the bonuses granted in 2009, and ensure that in the future, managers are only paid appropriate industry competitive salaries.

The measures provided for in this motion are critical to the security of all Canadians and are worth the support of every member of this House.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, how does my colleague think we can improve the pension system in this country when every few years the government basically gives exemptions to people who buy new houses? On the one hand we tell people to save for their retirement, and then every couple of years in order to boost the housing industry the government allows people to use some of their RRSP money for a down payment on a house. In effect, that is working at cross purposes to the idea of having a pension.

There are at least two provinces, maybe more by now, that have introduced legislation, Saskatchewan being the first, to allow people to access their pension funds several years before retirement. They have to make an argument for it, but if they can make an argument, for example a medical argument, they are allowed to take the money out.

How can people possibly build up retirement savings when the government keeps allowing exemptions, such as we have seen and which I have just indicated exist?

Business of Supply

• (1540)

Ms. Linda Duncan: Madam Speaker, I think the drift of the member's question is much broader. It is something that concerns me.

Members of my family have always been private entrepreneurs. My brother runs his own small landscape business. I have a lot of friends who have their own enterprises. That is what Alberta is all about; we are entrepreneurs. It is definitely the case right across Canada. It is the backbone of the economy.

It is time that the government stood back and took a look at where we are headed in this country. Now the government is encouraging Canadians to save, at a time when people do not even have money to pay their rent and utilities let alone save for a house. They are already depleting their retirement savings plans. Who, except for the very wealthy, have the luxury of actually thinking about opening a tax-free savings account?

It is critical for us to stand back and take a look at what we are offering this country for income security, and particularly for seniors later in life. They worked hard. We honour our veterans, but we are not really thinking about our veterans staying in their homes. We need to be thinking about the soldiers who are working overseas right now. What kind of security are they going to have for their homes and families?

I agree that we need to revisit these policies. We also need to be putting a lot more money into affordable housing. Let us not just do all of this on the backs of Canadians. Let us take a broad look at how we are spending taxpayers' money.

Mr. Jim Maloway: Madam Speaker, when the Liberals set up the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board back in 2007, they did not know at the time that it was going to turn out to be the disaster that it is. We see now that the annualized rate of return in investments since that group took over is only 4.3%. We could have done better if we had just stayed with government bonds, which we had for years and years before that.

I want to ask the member whether she thinks it is time for the Liberals to tell us just what they are going to do with this investment board. The last two speakers have indicated that they want to keep the board. That is a surprising answer when we see evidence that clearly indicates we should get rid of the board.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Madam Speaker, the issue the member has raised is much broader. Indeed, we should be revisiting the advisability of having this board.

There is a pattern that we have been seeing for quite some time in the federal government. Instead of taking responsibility for the proper management of our resources, taxpayers' dollars and our budget, the government has been allowing people other than elected officials in the House to take over that responsibility. Another example is the appointment of people from the resource industry to give us advice on how we should be managing greenhouse gases.

It is time that members in the House took responsibility. We are elected to make the hard decisions and we should take responsibility for them. If people are going to advise us, they should be from across broad sectors. Let us hear from Canadians rather than the ones who are obviously investing our money unwisely.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to this excellent motion on behalf of the people of my riding of Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

We are in a serious economic crisis, the scale of which has not been seen since the Great Depression in the 1930s. We have tried to learn some lessons from our parents and grandparents who lived in that time, but it appears the government has not learned those lessons.

Most in this place will know that the CCF was the first party in Canada to speak of fair wages, of benefits, of medicare and, as it relates to the business of today, of pensions. Over the last five decades, the New Democratic Party has always taken the responsibility of protecting and promoting the interests of working and retired Canadians alike.

Today's motion, put forward by my hon. colleague from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, builds on the proud traditions of our party and he should be proud of his personal contribution today. Each point of this well written, reasonable and principled motion deserves the support of all members in this place.

On the first point, expanding and increasing CPP/QPP, OAS and GIS to ensure all Canadians can count on a dignified retirement, there can be no reasonable argument against this point in this place. It is in the interests of all Canadians.

On the second point, establishing a self-financing pension insurance program to ensure the viability of workplace sponsored plans in tough economy times, I am certain that a large majority of members in this place will also see the merits.

Recently the Superintendent of Bankruptcies reported that there have been 106,459 bankruptcies in the 12 months ending this April, which is 21% more than those filed in the year ending in April 2008. What does this mean? It means it is more obvious than ever that we must protect pensions by working with provincial governments to establish a system of pension insurance.

I will elaborate on the third point in a moment as it is of special importance to the people of the riding I represent.

The fourth point of the motion, in the interest of appropriate management of the CPP, is that the Government of Canada immediately protect the CPP from imprudent investment practices by ceasing the practice of awarding managers performance-based bonuses. Every member of this place surely knows this is the right, good and principled thing to do.

The most recent bonuses for the CPP board executives are as follows: David Denison, \$2,361,022; Mark Wiseman \$2,112,115; Donald Raymond, \$1,296,573; and Graeme Eadie, \$1,077,239. These bonuses have been paid out despite the fact that in the last 10 years the CPP fund would have made \$13 billion more than it did if it had been invested in government bonds, rather than a diversified portfolio of equities, real estate and bonds as advised by those so-called experts who received millions in bonuses during that time.

Business of Supply

The failure of the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board to adequately look after the finances of our most cherished social policy means the change must happen and a reform to this process as prescribed by the NDP in this motion is the right thing to do, not just for those responsible for investing the funds, but those in our households who depend on it today and will depend on it tomorrow.

The necessity and appropriateness of the fifth point, taking all necessary steps to recover those bonuses for 2009, ensuring managers in the future are paid appropriate industry competitive salaries, goes without saying.

I come back now on behalf of the constituents of Thunder Bay—Rainy River to the third point of the New Democratic motion on pensions. New Democrats are bringing forward a motion to ensure that workers' pension funds go to the front of the line of creditors in the event of bankruptcy proceedings. We know this is right. We know this is justified. We know this is necessary. We know this must be done.

• (1545)

I recently held town halls on this very issue and others as it relates to the forestry sector. Here is what my constituents had to say on the matter.

Herman Pruys, Leon DeGagne, among others at the Fort Frances meeting, just want to be paid for the work that they and their colleagues have already performed. In case hon. members do not already know, pensions are really deferred payment for work completed. Herman and Leon are owed money for work done over a long period of time and this motion would ensure that they get it, no matter what.

At the Thunder Bay meeting, constituents rightly pointed out that the workers had to fight tooth and nail for the benefits that had been in collective agreements over decades in some cases. They lament that companies today seem to think that such collective agreements are just a piece of paper to be ignored. The actions of Conservative and Liberal governments over the last decade have allowed companies to disrespect these agreements and ignore those obligations.

Buchanan Forestry Products is out of business and AbitibiBowater is struggling to regain solvency. As a result of the failure of these companies, I have seen first-hand the hard-earned pensions of men and women lost or put to the back of the line when a company declares bankruptcy.

I speak these words and offer my support for this important motion today on behalf of the workers and their families of the riding of Thunder Bay—Rainy River. I thank the New Democrat member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek for tabling it on behalf of all Canadians.

The failure of the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board to adequately look after the finances of our most cherished social policy means that change must happen and a reform to this process, as prescribed by the New Democratic Party in the motion, is the right thing to do, not just for those responsible for investing the funds but those in our households who depend on it today and who will depend on it tomorrow.

New Democrats are bringing forward a motion to ensure that workers' pension funds go to the front of the line of creditors in the event of bankruptcy proceedings. We know that this is right. We know that this is justified. We know that this is necessary. We know that this must be done.

A greater injustice is not known to working families than the loss of a pension and a livelihood in what should be their golden years. The New Democrat motion, if supported by other parties and put into practice by the government, would protect the pensions of the families in my riding, and I urge every member of the House to offer their support for it for that reason.

• (1550)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think that it is important to work for our seniors and recognize their contribution to our society. Our government has taken real action, in particular to help low-income seniors who have self-identified but are not receiving the guaranteed income supplement. I would like to know what they think about the measures we have introduced, which have meant that since 2002, nearly 328,000 more low-income seniors have been receiving the guaranteed income supplement.

I would like to know whether that is in line with my colleague's proposal and whether he believes that our government has taken appropriate action to ensure that our most vulnerable seniors can receive income over and above their basic pension in order to meet their financial needs, especially during this time of economic hardship.

[*English*]

Mr. John Rafferty: Madam Speaker, poverty among seniors is a complicated issue. While some steps have been taken by all governments in the last number of years, the proper things have not been done in a timely manner.

I will relate to my hon. colleague a situation in Atikokan, one of the communities in my riding. When I was there a little while ago I spoke to some seniors. They told me that they just could not survive on their fixed incomes. They showed me their electricity bills and said that they could not pay them. For 35 years their house has been paid, but they cannot pay their electricity bill and stay in their house. This is a very real problem.

Not only do the contents of the motion need to be accepted by everyone in the House, but we also need to ensure that we work with provincial governments and municipalities to ensure that poverty among seniors becomes a thing of the past.

• (1555)

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River for his support for the motion.

Every time I have stood on my feet today, I have pointed to one fact. As I have said before, in the cut and thrust of our debate we often lose sight of things when we agree. This is one of the times in this place when all parties are in agreement. We will debate the issues of the motion in the time that remains, but the concepts of the motion on how we can help seniors and the fact that now is the time to do so is a motivator to us all.

Business of Supply

We see so many closures in northern Ontario. This guaranteed fund, the insurance plan, would protect pensions. We protect our cars and homes with insurance, even our investments. How does the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River see that being helpful to his constituents?

Mr. John Rafferty: Madam Speaker, it is absolutely essential for protecting pensions. There have been a large number of bankruptcies in the forestry industry and other businesses in northwestern Ontario in particular. It is very clear that when pensions need to be paid out, there is no money. They are at the back of the line, not the front.

Some of these workers have paid in for 35 or 40 years, even 42 years. A potential pensioner spoke to me about the service he had with a particular forest company. If someone pay into a pension plan for 42 years, it would be deferred wages. That is money owed to the person. In fact, I would make the case that this money should be paid out first.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to inform you that I will be sharing my time with the member for Huron—Bruce, who recently arrived in the House on our side and, in short order, injected nearly \$30 million in infrastructure into his riding and has generated many projects. He has broadened horizons bringing new vitality to seniors.

I would, in fact, like to speak of seniors today. The people in my riding often ask me what we are doing for seniors. They tell me that we must remember when we are in Ottawa that seniors represent a large proportion of those who sent us here. They tell me to remember the contribution they continue to make to society. These people help often with care for children, sometimes babysitting them. They do a lot of volunteer work, getting involved in community organizations. They ask us to remember what they have done and to do something for them.

In the time given me, I would like to point out that this is a special day, as we have revealed the results of our economic action plan. We have shown the extent to which we are preserving our seniors' heritage. I would also like to point out a few specific measures and talk about the actions that have been taken in recent weeks and months to ensure that seniors have more money in their pockets to meet the current economic challenges.

Our government attaches great importance to the contributions seniors have made and continue to make to our country. We recognize that all Canadians, including older people, look to government for support in these turbulent economic times. They can count on us. We will continue to do what is necessary for the seniors who have helped make this country what it is today, a good place to live and one we are so proud of.

With the number of older people growing, we have worked actively to find ways to improve their quality of life. Our government has established various measures to improve the financial security and general well being of seniors and those who are retired. The old age security program is the cornerstone of the retirement income system in Canada. It provides basic income support to practically all Canadians from age 65. In addition, the guaranteed income supplement has played a significant role in reducing poverty among seniors in Canada. Between 1980 and 2007,

the number of seniors living in poverty decreased from 21.3% of the population to 4.8%.

Our government is doing its utmost to improve the guaranteed income supplement so that it meets the needs of Canadians even better. We have raised the guaranteed income supplement to 7% more than the level of pension indexation. In other words, we have increased it faster than inflation, which amounts to \$2.7 billion shared among everyone receiving the GIS, namely some 1.6 million seniors. The most disadvantaged seniors can therefore count on additional support from the Conservative government. We have also increased the GIS earnings exemption to \$3,500. That means that a single pensioner earning \$3,500 or more may now keep up to an additional \$1,500 in annual GIS benefits.

I can assure the members of this House that our government is determined to see that seniors receive the benefits to which they are entitled. Since last year, our government has provided for automatic renewal for recipients of the guaranteed income supplement if they have filed a tax return. In other words, seniors need apply for the supplement only once, provided they continue to file a tax return yearly, which is a legal obligation.

We are doing our utmost to spread the word on the guaranteed income supplement to as many seniors as possible.

• (1600)

For example, we mail out guaranteed income supplement applications to low-income seniors who have been identified as such by the income tax system, but are not getting the supplement. Thanks to this automatic flagging system, since 2002, close to 328,000 more low-income seniors now receive the guaranteed income supplement.

We are also working with community service providers and partners in the private sector to ensure that hard to reach seniors—such as aboriginal seniors, people with no fixed address, immigrants and the disabled—know that these benefits exist and can access them.

Seniors are, of course, living longer, and staying healthy longer. They are also still in the work force. My father, at the respectable age of 70, is still in the work force and contributing to Canadian society. In order to limit the obstacles to those wishing to keep working, we have invested \$60 million annually to make sure that low-income seniors who are working can benefit more from their earnings by raising the income exemption for the guaranteed income supplement. This change has benefited 100,000 working seniors who receive the guaranteed income supplement.

We have also improved numerous programs already in place, such as New Horizons for Seniors, which helps seniors all over the country to strengthen their communities. To give some examples of this: the seniors club in Buckland was able to replace some chairs and refrigerators and thus to continue their activities. The seniors of Saint-Damien improved the kitchen in their community centre, and those in Lac-Etchemin organized a play. These and other fine initiatives in all parts of the country have been supported by our New Horizons for Seniors program .

In the 2007 budget, our government increased the New Horizons for Seniors program budget by \$10 million, specifically to be able to help improve facilities and equipment used by existing seniors' programs and to raise public awareness of senior abuse.

As well, we have created the tax free savings account, which allows seniors to earn interest on their savings without affecting eligibility for the guaranteed income supplement.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, our government reiterated its commitment to seniors in our economic action plan. We are presenting the second report concerning that plan here today. We are on track to achieve 80% of the goals set in that plan. Here are some of the measures we introduced: another \$300 million on top of the additional \$1.6 billion targeted for seniors for the 2009 fiscal year. This includes providing seniors with \$200 million in tax relief by reducing the required minimum withdrawal amount for 2008 from registered retirement income funds by 25%. This change recognizes the impact of the deterioration in market conditions on retirement savings.

We are also increasing the old age credit by \$1,000 for 2009 and subsequent years to allow seniors to save even more on taxes. We had already increased the old age credit by \$1,000 in 2006 and we made further improvements in 2009. All my Conservative colleagues from Quebec supported those measures.

I would like to present another measure before I end my speech. The old age credit increases are based on previous tax breaks. We also doubled the amount of the pension income credit from \$1,000 to \$2,000. As we all remember, we introduced income splitting, which is putting a lot of money back into the hands of seniors.

Another measure I would like to mention is the almost \$60 million in funding for the targeted initiative for older workers.

We also introduced some housing initiatives, with \$400 million targeted for our seniors. I could go on and list other measures of course, but I would like to take a moment to thank my colleague here in the House for raising his concerns about seniors and their financial security.

• (1605)

I think I have clearly demonstrated that, over the course of the last two Parliaments, our government has implemented additional measures to help our seniors, who deserve our utmost respect.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member is aware that the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board was incorporated as a federal crown corporation long before he was in the government, by an act of Parliament, in

Business of Supply

December 1997, and it made its first investment in March 1999. The fund, as of March 31, is now \$105 billion and probably dropping quickly.

When the Liberals set up the fund, they told Canadians that we could make higher returns on our savings in the CPP if they were invested in the stock market and in private sector investments instead of government bonds. At the time, that probably made some sense. Not only was the federal government doing it, but provincial governments were also allowing their crown corporations to invest surplus funds in equity investments.

However, the history has turned out to be very bad. In 2008, the CPP lost \$23.6 billion. The annualized rate of return since that time, in the last 10 years, is only 4.3%, which is what these investment geniuses were able to get. At 4.3%, that gave us a total of \$23.8 billion over the last 10 years. Now, had that money been simply put in long-term government bonds, the fund would have done \$13 billion better.

So the question, then, is whether the member is prepared to admit that it is time to get rid of the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board so we can save the \$300,000 salaries, so we can save the \$7 million bonuses—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please.

The hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Blaney: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his well-researched question, in which he referred to the financial crisis we have undergone and to the declining returns that have troubled all pension funds, not just seniors' funds, but all investment funds. I am sure that, like me, my colleague has seen his income and investments drop in value during this financial crisis.

However, we must not forget that 4.3% is a pretty respectable rate of return all things considered. Some pension funds have seen the value of their assets decline, but it would be unwise to make any dramatic changes during a difficult financial period.

A constructive risk management strategy was in place, and we have to maintain it. We are already seeing encouraging signs that economic activity is picking up steam.

One thing is for sure, and I can assure all Canadians, particularly seniors, that despite economic ups and downs, our plan has the flexibility and the capacity to keep up with benefit payments. It is important to seniors and to our government that we ensure access to a stable source of income for seniors.

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•(1610)

[English]

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member's conversation about GIS, in particular, caught my interest when he said that there was an effort on the government's part to get information out to seniors regarding the GIS.

I have always been a little bit on the curious side. Canada's tax system is such that our birthdate is available and the amount of our income is available. Therefore, the government is aware of the financial situation of any Canadian who has filed an income tax return and of the fact that he or she is already receiving OAS. One would think that the evidence that seniors need the GIS is very clear. Why would the government not either make it automatic or at least make notification automatic in those cases?

[Translation]

Mr. Steven Blaney: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question about what the government has done and must continue to do to ensure that all seniors who are eligible for the guaranteed income supplement have access to it.

I would note that, as of 2002, individuals who file a tax return and meet the age and income requirements to qualify for the guaranteed income supplement automatically receive the application once. After that, they are more or less registered for life unless their financial situation changes. They are registered to receive the guaranteed income supplement for life. Since 2002, we have tracked down 328,000 seniors who now have access to the guaranteed income supplement.

[English]

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to today's motion. I would like to thank the member for Lévis—Bellechasse as well.

As members know, Canada has a three-pillar retirement income system based on a balanced mix of public-private responsibility and voluntary, compulsory programs.

The first pillar, the old age security and guaranteed income supplement programs, provides a basic minimum income, guaranteed for seniors who meet residence requirements.

The second pillar, the Canada and Quebec pension plans, ensures a basic level of earnings replacement in retirement for all workers in Canada.

The third pillar, the system of voluntary tax-deferred savings in RPPs and registered retirement savings plans, encourages and assists Canadians to save for retirement, to help bridge the gap between public pension benefits and the retirement income goals.

Issues surrounding pensions have grown in increasing importance recently, as this is an issue that impacts all Canadians in one way or another. Our Conservative government has recognized that reality.

I would like to highlight key initiatives that we have recently unveiled to support pensions and help protect the retirement of Canadians across this country.

Let me begin by pointing out to the House that our government started this process by actually consulting with Canadians, releasing a comprehensive discussion paper on improving the framework for federally regulated private pension plans. This important discussion paper, available online for all to read, was part of our effort to reach out to Canadians for their views and input on issues related to federally regulated pension plans.

Indeed, the public was invited to make submissions directly to the government in response to this paper, and in fact, our government has already posted responses we have received to this initiative online. This input, open for all to see, will help inform permanent changes our government intends to make later this year to federally regulated pension.

Before continuing, let me remind all members that the federal government only directly regulates private pension plans subject to federal legislation, that is, areas of employment under federal jurisdiction, including banking, telecommunications and interprovincial transportation. These plans currently only represent 7% of all private pension plans in Canada, with the balance regulated provincially.

In addition to the release of that discussion paper, we went further in talking and listening directly to the concerns of Canadians, as our government held a series of national consultations earlier this year. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, the member of Parliament for Macleod, went right across Canada to meet face to face with people from Halifax, Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Edmonton, Vancouver and Whitehorse. Those who could not attend these meetings were invited to send in written submissions on the discussion paper.

There is no denying that we are in the midst of one of the most challenging economic periods in recent memory and that has caused a sharp decline in global markets, which has led to losses in many pension plans. Our government has recognized that challenge and taken specific concrete measures to provide temporary solvency funding relief for federally regulated, defined benefit pension plans, as originally outlined in our 2008 economic and fiscal statement.

The Federal Superannuates National Association, in reaction to these changes, publicly congratulated our government “for recognizing the need and placing priority on creating an equitable and fair pension system for Canadians—”.

Again, these measures covered plans established for employees working in areas that fall under federal jurisdiction only and offered temporary relief to sponsors while also protecting pension benefits.

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● (1615)

The proposed regulations set out a series of measures to: first, extend the solvency funding period by one year for deficiencies reported as of year-end between November 1, 2008 and October 31, 2009; second, extend the solvency funding payment to 10 years from 5 with the agreement of members and retirees; third, extend the solvency funding payment to 10 years from 5 when the difference is secured with a letter of credit; fourth, extend the solvency funding payment period to 10 years from 5 for agent crown corporations with terms and conditions to ensure a level playing field; and fifth, allow asset smoothing above 110% with the difference in payments subject to a deemed trust.

We have recently also taken other important steps to help protect the retirement savings of individual Canadians. For instance, in recognition of the exceptional deterioration of market conditions and its effect on retirees' savings, in the 2008 economic and fiscal statement we announced a 25% reduction in the required minimum withdrawal amount for registered retirement income funds for 2008. This one-time measure has provided an estimated \$200 million in tax assistance to retirees by allowing them to keep more of their savings in their RRIFs.

A respected *Financial Post* columnist, Jonathan Chevreau, declared that this measure gave “pensioners and pension-plan administrators more flexibility to deal with the market malaise that has triggered a plunge in asset values recent months”.

Our government has also increased the age at which RRSPs must be matured from 69 to 71. With this change, RRIF minimum withdrawals are not required to begin until the year an individual turns 72 years of age, which is well above the medium retirement age in Canada. I hear my colleague from Newfoundland adding some comments across the way, and I would encourage him to participate when his turn comes.

Another important development in supporting retirees and their savings was reached this past May when the finance minister met with his provincial and territorial counterparts at their annual spring meeting. At that meeting, the results of the tri-annual review of the Canada pension plan were announced. The federal, provincial and territorial ministers all agreed that Canada's retirement income system was healthy and compared well internationally in terms of adequacy and affordability, confirming that the CPP remained on sound financial footing despite the market downturn.

The minister also unanimously recommended numerous key changes to the CPP to increase flexibility for older workers, expand CPP coverage and improve fairness in the plan's flexibility retirement provisions. Key among the changes: providing greater flexibility to those taking up the retirement benefit before the age of 65 to enable them to combine pension and work, and an enhancement in the pension formula to exclude up to an additional year of low earnings.

Jack Mintz, public policy professor at the University of Calgary, heralded these changes, remarking, “The more flexibility you build into pension arrangements, the better”.

Finn Poschmann of the C.D. Howe Institute said:

This is an important shift in public pension policy. The proposed adjustments mark an important sea-change in government pension policy's approach to dealing with population ageing and, in particular, making it easier for those people who want to work later in life to do so.

The *Edmonton Journal* cheered them as “an overdue update of the CPP which reflects contemporary realities”.

Those are not my words, these are the words of eminent public policy persons. What is more, ministers also agreed to the extraordinary step of creating a research working group, something suggested by today's motion, on retirement savings adequacy. This group was tasked to quickly undertake that study and report back to the ministers of finance and ministers responsible for pensions by the end of the year.

Clearly, promoting the retirement income security of Canadians has been and will continue to be an important goal of the Government of Canada. To conclude, let me say our Conservative government is working hard in consultations with the provinces, territories and, most importantly, Canadians across this country.

● (1620)

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank all members who have participated in this debate and who finally understand the harsh reality that is confronting so many seniors.

In particular, I want to commend the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek. Clearly, his superior political skills have brought people on board with this very important motion. I am very pleased to see that happen in the House.

I would like to ask the member opposite a question. While he is being very supportive in a forward-looking way of the things we all ought to turn our minds to with respect to helping seniors, could he talk a bit about an initiative that might actually help seniors today?

As the member will know, Statistics Canada from 2001 until 2006 miscalculated the consumer price index. As a result of that, seniors right across the country were shortchanged on their public pensions. That is money that is owed to seniors. It was a legal entitlement. They are owed that money by the government. The government has recognized the mistake and, yet, has done absolutely nothing to reimburse Canadian seniors the money owed to them. Of course, in the middle of this economic crisis, seniors need that money desperately.

The member has acknowledged that need for financial support in his speech. I wonder if he could rise and say when the government will act on reimbursing seniors for a mistake that was made by Statistics Canada which was clearly no fault of their own.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Madam Speaker, I would like to give the member a brief rundown. I could go on for hours about all that we have done for seniors in this great country, but I will provide just a brief rundown.

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We have introduced a minister of state for seniors. We have established a national council for seniors. We have introduced pension income splitting, which has been tremendously popular in my riding of Huron—Bruce. We have increased the age credit by \$1,000 and then increased it by another \$1,000, resulting in tax savings to 2.2 million seniors. We have increased the GIS amount by 7% over and above regular indexation to give low-income seniors an additional \$2.7 billion.

As a member of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities which is studying poverty in Canada, I can say that this is one of the great measures that has brought our seniors up a level.

•(1625)

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have a couple of questions for the member.

Yes, we have a terrific CPP system in this country and it works very well. One thing I am hearing from my constituents is that if there are two seniors on CPP and the husband would like to do a bit of work, every time he does, his CPP gets clawed back.

We are getting into an older generation now. The baby boom generation is getting older and some seniors would like to work a bit longer, but it is not worth their while because of the clawback. I am wondering if his government would look at putting a small cap on or providing a cushion so that some seniors could earn a bit of income without being clawed back.

My second question is this. He talked about everything his government has done for seniors. Perhaps he would like to explain its commitment not to touch income trusts and then shortly after being elected it put a tax on income trusts. Let us talk about the hard-working seniors who lost a lot of money because of that broken promise.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Madam Speaker, the hon. member and I serve on the veterans affairs committee, and I know he is very concerned about seniors not only in Huron—Bruce but in his riding in Newfoundland.

There is one thing I would like to point out. We have heard today many comments about the performance of the CPIX, the dollars and the executives. If we always look at just one period of time, March 31, 2009, that is not a fair representation for the overall performance.

I know the member for Elmwood—Transcona has made numerous commentaries, but if we look at the time following the date he quoted, which would be March 31 until today, he might note that the Toronto Stock Exchange has actually increased 30%.

He also criticized many of the stocks that were picked and are well within the public portion of the equities. One is Cott Corporation, a Canadian beverage company. Since that date, Cott has increased 500%, the same people Liberals want to criticize. SNC Lavalin is another company that is up 35% in three months and Suncor is up 40%.

I would like to make the record clear that if people take a picture at any one time, they get a great understanding.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the NDP motion put forward by my colleague from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek. I will be sharing my time with the member for Elmwood—Transcona.

The motion is about the dignity of Canadians, of senior and retired Canadians. I am far from retirement, but I care a lot about the issues facing seniors.

I would like to share a story with the House.

Before I became an MP, I worked as a community legal workers in Halifax. I worked on different poverty law issues. I was approached by a group of seniors living in a retirement apartment building. They were tenants and they were having problems with their building. They came to me for legal help and legal support. I helped them organize. This group of seniors mobilized and collectively worked to solve the problems in the building.

A year later when they found out I was running in the 2008 election, they came to me and said to me that I had helped them when they needed help and I was the only one who stood up to help them. Therefore, they said that they were there to help me. They hit the streets. They went out in droves, knocking on doors, talking to their neighbours and they started working on my campaign.

It was interesting at my nomination meeting, a nomination where a young woman was seeking election, an entire section of the audience was filled with my friends who were in their scooters, their walkers and with their well-earned grey hair rooting for me. When I won the election, they came to me and said that they felt invisible to the government, that they felt the issues of seniors were not important issues. They wanted me to go to Ottawa to stand up for them. Therefore, I rise today to honour that commitment.

In my work on poverty, I have often seen people throw up their hands in defeat when they are working on poverty issues. They say that it is too big, that it is too complicated, that there is no solution and that it is too complex.

I always use our Canada pension plan, our old age security and our guaranteed income supplement pension scheme as an example that it can be done. We can solve the problem of poverty. We did it for seniors. We dramatically reduced the rates of poverty in the country.

Professor Lars Osberg is an economist at Dalhousie University. He wrote a paper entitled "Poverty among Senior Citizens: A Canadian Success Story". The paper looks at the poverty rates among seniors before and after the pension scheme was introduced. As his title suggests, it is a true success story.

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Professor Osberg writes that in 1947 Canada had a means tested old age pension plan. It was available for the absolute poorest in Canada. It worked out to about \$30 a month. In today's dollars that was about \$289 a month. In 1952 that was replaced by the OAS system, the old age security system. OAS was a universal payment of \$40 a month. Now that would be worth about \$274 according to Lars Osberg.

With income at this level, the result was widespread and acute poverty among Canadians over the age of 65. Canadians had to wait until 1967 for the introduction of the guaranteed income supplement and the Canada pension plan. As the system matured throughout the 1970s, poverty rates among senior citizens dropped dramatically. They plummeted. Rates of poverty were still high for certain groups, and I am thinking especially among senior single women, but by and large this system lifted Canadian seniors out of poverty. It was a remarkable achievement. It was an achievement for all Canadians. Unfortunately today that achievement is slipping away from us.

The motion confronts a critical issue faced by Canadians, and I am very proud to support it. My colleague from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek has been travelling the country, holding town hall meetings and community forums, where he invites seniors to come in, talk to him, tell him what issues are facing them and what are their concerns.

I had the wonderful opportunity to be with him at one of these town hall meetings in southwestern Ontario. What I heard in southwestern Ontario is exactly what I hear in Halifax. Seniors who rely on CPP, OAS and GIS are struggling to survive. They are having to choose between putting food on their tables or keeping their homes heated. The cost of living goes up, but their pension benefits stay the same, so it comes down to nutritious food or medicine.

• (1630)

The motion mandates the government to work with provinces and territories to ensure the sustainability of Canadians' retirement income by bringing forward measures, like expanding and increasing CPP, OAS and GIS, to ensure that all Canadians can count on a dignified retirement. A dignified retirement is something all Canadians deserve.

It is time for the federal government to stop standing on the sidelines, allowing the retirement security of Canadians to be compromised. We want to see real action and leadership. Canadians want to see real action and leadership, Canadians like members of the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, or CARP.

CARP has recently supported a portable, universal pension plan based on the CPP architecture for the nearly one in three Canadians without any retirement savings. There are many out there without these savings. CARP believes this plan should be funded by contributions from employers and employees. It also agrees that self-employed Canadians should be allowed to participate in this plan.

The Canadian Labour Congress is also calling for changes to these schemes. It is calling for a doubling of CPP and QPP to be phased in. One of the wonderful side benefits is that it will not just relieve poverty, but it will also help stimulate our economy. By increasing income supports for seniors through our public pension program,

many pensioners, who are living on fixed incomes, would use that money immediately in their local economies. This would equate to a stimulus measure that would ensure more funds would be circulating in communities around Canada.

It would not take much. A \$1 billion increase in OAS and GIS would virtually eliminate poverty among seniors in our country. This figure would likely be about \$1 billion a year in order to maintain the benefit over time. To some people who are listening or who will be reading this at home, \$1 billion may seem like a lot of money, but the 1% cut to the GST equalled \$6 billion, so it is about government decisions. It is about choices.

It goes without saying that increasing old age security benefits would protect vulnerable Canadians, especially older women, who, as I mentioned, have been historically a group that have not benefited as robustly from our pension scheme. It would help protect vulnerable people like single, elderly women.

However, another group experiences poverty, despite our existing regime, and that is new Canadians. They face a double disadvantage in the Canadian pension system. Public pension acquisition is very problematic for immigrants because of residency requirements. A 2003 survey found that 26% of recent immigrant seniors were in the lowest income quintile, versus 15% of non-immigrant seniors.

Expanding and increasing our federal pension program could alleviate poverty among recent immigrant seniors and among single senior women. It is a big win for us.

I have only spoken to the first section of the motion. There are four other sections that make real changes to our pension system, including establishing a pension insurance program for workplace sponsored pension plans, ensuring that workers' pension funds go to the front of the line of creditors in the event of bankruptcy and ceasing the practice of awarding CPP managers performance-based bonuses. All these points are worth supporting.

In short, I am very proud to support my colleague's motion, and I am hopeful that my colleagues on both sides of the House will agree.

• (1635)

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Madam Speaker, before I ask a question of the member, I want to point out something that the previous speaker said, which was about the return on the dollars and on the revenue and should that be rewarded with a bonus. I will point out that for the last four years, which is the rolling time for the executives of the CPP Investment Board, they lost money. In this last year, they lost the equivalent of all of the contributions before.

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I want to turn to the member for Halifax and ask for her views on the insurance plan we have talked about and how that would help protect pensions, like at Air Canada and perhaps even Canadian National Railways, the concept being that the plan would be funded by the sponsors. It would be like buying insurance for our homes. Should a company go bankrupt or the plan be wound up, the assets would be transferred to this plan in order to protect those seniors, those people who have invested in those plans for years.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for bringing forward the motion today and for the great work he has been doing concerning the rights of seniors.

We insure our cars, we insure our homes, we have deposit insurance to cover our savings, so why would we not insure our pensions? This makes perfect sense. The insurance system could be comparable to what exists through Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation for bank deposits, RRSPs and tax-free savings accounts. There is a model out there. It is not something just pulled out of the air. There are really good models.

We need to protect pensions by working with the provincial governments to establish pension insurance, but federal leadership is needed. We need federal leadership to work with the provinces to develop pension insurance regime and, as the hon. member said, to ensure workers actually receive the retirements benefits they have earned, even if their employer goes out of business. This makes good sense for Canadians.

• (1640)

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek and the member for Halifax for her speech, which was very well done. If the member chooses to judge the performance of numbers on one day or after the greatest drop in the stock market in a generation, I will let that be his choice. It is unfortunate.

The member for Elmwood—Transcona discussed all the assets being put into bonds. We know the Government of Canada bond yield rate now for one to three years is 1.47%. For three to five years, it is 2.66%. Does the member for Halifax feel that is a fair return for the seniors she represents, 1.47% as the member for Elmwood—Transcona would have people do?

Ms. Megan Leslie: Madam Speaker, what I would like to see and what I am sure all Canadians would like to see is something that makes good sense. The facts are in the last 10 years the CPP fund would have made \$13 billion more than it did if it had been invested in government bonds. We can talk about rates of returns, but what we need are the facts in front of us. We would have been much better off had they been invested in government bonds rather than a diversified portfolio of real estate, equities and bonds.

Further, we are losing all this money, \$13 billion, and we are still rewarding the CPP board executives with \$1 million to \$2 million salaries and bonuses. It is really quite remarkable. If Canadians had this information in front of them, I think they would agree.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Hull—Aylmer, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation; the

hon. member for Gatineau, Arts and Culture; the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina, Citizenship and Immigration.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP) Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the NDP motion today. It is a very well-timed and well put together motion. I am really pleased to hear that all parties agree with the motion. Surprise of surprises, even the government is evidently going to support the motion.

We certainly do have some differences of opinion as to where we have been over the last few years and how we should proceed from this point on. Why the Conservatives, from a political point of view, would want to carry the can for the Liberals from 15 years ago is just beyond me.

Fifteen years ago, changes were made to the Canada pension plan. The investment board was incorporated as a federal crown corporation back in December 1997. It made its first investment in March 1999. I recall the Liberal government making some necessary changes at the time. The Liberals increased the contribution levels, and that was absolutely necessary. I have to give them full credit for taking responsibility and doing the right thing at that time. What they did not do right at the time was to set up this investment board and hire these fund managers.

Pension funds, federally and provincially, and provincial crown corporations have had very conservative investment policies for many, many years. For example, insurance companies have investment policies so that money is available when claims have to be paid. Members of the government must have learned something from their grandmothers when they were told to invest in a conservative fashion and not put money in different types of schemes that would get them no return.

We have collective historical experience to go on. We know that insurance premiums, whether for house insurance or car insurance, have to be there when the time comes. There is not a lot of difference between that and a pension system. People want to make sure that when the time comes to retire that there is actually money there.

Government should not be looking at short-term solutions. I am not blaming the current government; the previous government did this as well. Governments play and tinker with the pension system in a number of ways. One of the things was that in order to stimulate new home purchases, the government allowed people to take money out of their RRSPs as a down payment. That was great. This perhaps resulted in more housing starts for a short period of time. However, people are basically robbing their pension funds when they do things like that.

Business of Supply

At least two provinces, maybe more now, and maybe more will follow, have introduced legislation allowing people to take money out of their pension plans. Saskatchewan was the first to do that, and there was quite a controversy about it. People tend to look at what is in front of them today and not what could come down the road 10 or 15 years from now, so they take money out of their pension funds.

When my own government in Manitoba did it, I argued that we were solving a short-term problem but creating a longer term one. The people who would not have pension funds available to them would be coming to the government 10 or 15 years later.

That was the environment we saw back in 1997. The Liberals, like a lot of other governments, allowed these funds to be invested in equities. It is no surprise that problems developed. Manitoba and other places have run into problems by taking people's money and investing in businesses that do not work out. What can we expect when we turn our money over to investment advisors? Those advisors get bonuses based on how much they get in the short run, which tends to lead them into more risky investments, and when it all falls apart, they have a mess on their hands.

At this point, what you should be doing, and it doesn't sound like you're going to, but you should be taking some direct action and either firing the board or replacing the board and getting yourselves out of this mess. You can blame the Liberals, because they are the ones who brought it in in the first place.

When your voters find out—

• (1645)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I would like to remind the member that he should address himself to the Speaker rather than to members in the House directly.

Mr. Jim Maloway: Madam Speaker, look at these bonuses for the CPP board executives. David Denison, the CEO, earned \$2.3 million in bonuses. These are mind-boggling numbers for an average working person in Canada. Mark Wiseman earned \$2.1 million, Donald Raymond earned \$1.2 million and Graeme Eadie earned \$1 million.

I can guarantee that average voters are not aware of this. They think that the government is managing their funds properly. If they were to find out that the government set up the board back in 1997, hired these private investment people to run it and then gave them \$300,000 salaries with bonuses on top of that, they would be ready to vote the government out of office right away.

If the government does not do something about it, try to get this money back and at least make some effort here, I think that is going to happen. People are really going to be outraged when they get this information and they understand what it all means.

I am not sure how much time I have left. I want to mention that three or four years ago, a New York newspaper set up a contest. It had a number of stockbrokers picking out stocks against a monkey. This went on for a month or a month and a half. I think the stockbrokers won once or twice, but at the end of the day, they lost the contest to the monkey.

After three or four years, they decided to try this again. They thought they might get a smarter monkey the second time around.

Guess what happened again? The stockbrokers lost a second time. That should say something about how predictable markets can be and how so-called expertise in markets does not always work out.

As a matter of fact, the whole system is set up for sales. It really does not have a lot to do with return on investments as much as it does with trying to sell a product. That is what we are dealing with here. The government has been taken in by this whole idea that private investments gurus were going to turn water into wine and produce excellent returns, which by the way is not hard to do when the market is coming up. All of us can do that.

I have some personal experience with a number of people who got caught up in buying equities over the last few years. I will not mention specifically which pension plan it is, but I did come from the Manitoba legislature, so one could probably figure it out. After about 10 years, I do not think there was a single person in that plan who had all the money he started with.

These are people who are supposed to know better. They are supposed to have an idea about investments, yet they are going to the high-priced help to make investments for them.

This is a mess. The government should do something about trying to get itself out of it. If it does not want to do that, fine—

• (1650)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Questions and comments. The hon. member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to go back to the bonuses the member was talking about. There is a kind of greying happening in the debate here. I want to be very clear: these bonuses are not for one year. These bonuses are yearly, and they have set the amount of the bonus based on the previous four years.

Earlier, one speaker asked if one day is picked over another day. The reality is that they look at a four-year trend and that is how they assign the bonuses. However, they received more bonuses previously than what they have right now. People are outraged at what they are hearing today. Mr. Denison has received \$7.4 million in bonuses in four years when they have lost money in that plan. How does one justify that?

Mr. Jim Maloway: Madam Speaker, one absolutely cannot justify that. I think at a certain point and at a certain level, when people see information like this, they think it must be a misprint.

At the end of the day, we are going to have to get the message out, through our methods, to get people to understand what is actually going on with the government. I think when they do figure this all out, and they will, they are going to be very upset with the government and the Conservatives will be paying a price. Their numbers are sliding as it is. I would think they would try to figure out how to get out of their mess rather than dig themselves in even deeper.

Business of Supply

• (1655)

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Madam Speaker, I find it unfortunate that the member for Elmwood—Transcona is so bitter with the equity markets. The quarterly results for the CPPIB will come in at the end of June and the report will be out in the middle of August. Is the member prepared to come back in the fall and perhaps give some compliments to some of the members on the board? He seems to be pretty open and honest with his criticism in one of the worst economic downturns in our generation. Will he come back in the fall and provide some recognition to those same people?

Mr. Jim Maloway: Madam Speaker, my thoughts on this have really nothing to do with the vagaries of the investment cycle. When we deal with a class of business like pensions, we need to have a very conservative approach to investment. It has really nothing to do with whether the market is down today or is up tomorrow. We need to have the money there when people retire. The people who are contributing to the pension plan today are counting on having that money available 20 or 30 years from now. We cannot be playing with that money.

If the Conservatives want to play with money, then they should play with their own money, invest money in equities. That is fair ball. However, they are responsible for the future welfare of the public of Canada and they should treat the money with more respect than has been done right now.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Madam Speaker, has the hon. member ever invested in equity markets?

Mr. Jim Maloway: Madam Speaker, I want to assure members that I did not plant that question. I can tell members that coming out of this whole investment fiasco, I have not lost a cent so far. I have made money because I invest in long-term bonds and GICs, which I would highly recommend to members opposite. It might be boring and it might not be very exciting and they might not make as good a return for two or three years, but at the end of the day they will sleep better, they will feel better and they will have their principal and a bit of appreciated value over the long haul.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to debate the NDP motion. In doing so, I am very cognizant of the importance of the motion, especially with respect to the elderly and our oldest seniors.

A few years ago, people would live to the age of 75 or 80. Few lived longer. In 2008, there were 91,277 people in Quebec who were 90 or older. Of these, 62,566 were women. It is very interesting to note that there are 4,779 people in Laval aged 90 or over, or almost 5,000. Of these, 3,260 are women. In Laval alone, 50,000 people are more than 70 years old. Obviously, women over 70 do not have the same opportunities that today's younger women will have once they reach retirement age.

Naturally, these people were unable to contribute to pension plans. They did not work because they stayed at home to raise their many children. There was a baby boom in Quebec. Some women raised 15, 16 or 17 children and there was no time to go out to work and earn money. Quite often, the fathers of these families had blue-collar jobs that did not have pension plans either. These people helped shape Quebec and make our country what it is today, educated and

raised their children and helped them with their post-secondary studies so they could then find jobs. And yet, these people are often very poor because they were unable to contribute to any pension fund whatsoever.

This motion suggests that the living conditions of seniors and the old elderly could be improved. First of all, however, we need to ensure that women and men have the necessary tools for a decent retirement that will allow them to live out their remaining years in dignity and respect. If no action is taken beyond merely responding to the motion, only part of the problem will be solved, not all of it.

For some years now the Bloc Québécois has been insisting that people entitled to the guaranteed income supplement be assured access to it. This is one way. We also want those who were entitled to it but did not receive it and so were shortchanged to now receive their full arrears. Unfortunately, the government does not seem willing to do anything about this. On the very eve of the last election campaign, however, they voted along with us to ensure that those people would get the guaranteed income supplement with full retroactivity.

If we do not make sure that women get equal pay, they will reach retirement age without being able to benefit fully from the income they ought to have had. At the present time, women still are paid only 70% to 80% of what men are paid. So, all their working lives, they are carrying with them that 20% to 30% shortfall.

• (1700)

Then when they get to retirement age—since what people receive is approximately 42% of what they earned when working—they will be missing a large amount because they will not have benefited from pay equity, that is they will not have earned the same amount as their male partners or colleagues, even if they did the same work or work of similar value.

Then, of course, there is the matter of opportunities for women to work. If an older woman today does not have the opportunity of having an easy, happy and worthy retirement, it is because she did not have the opportunity to earn a living in the past. Proper child care services, like those we have in Quebec, are needed to enable women to enter the work force. If the government stubbornly insists on not putting proper child care services in place, while allowing Quebec to maintain its services and by contributing to those services, then it is certain that there will still be problems for the next 10, 20 or 30 years, even if this motion is passed.

Business of Supply

Unfortunately, even if this motion is adopted, people who contribute or would contribute will still not have an easy or comfortable retirement because their rights will have been violated at the start. This has to be corrected. We have to deal with all the upstream problems before we deal with this one, although I agree with our colleagues' motion. First and foremost, we have to ensure that women have access to employment insurance. We know that only 30% of women currently have access to EI. That is not many. This is because women often have to work part-time because they have to look after children or an ill parent or spouse and this is not considered work. It is invisible work that is not taken into account in the benefits women receive. Once again, they are being short-changed. If we do not solve this problem, women will become poorer and poorer and have a harder and harder time making ends meet.

Earlier, I heard my colleague from Nova Scotia say that seniors today have to make choices. That is true, but they have had to make choices for a long time. People were saying that when I arrived here nearly five years ago. And I am sure that my colleagues who were here before me said it as well. The cost of living is going way up. These people's fixed costs are going up. They are constantly being faced with new costs that are not taken into account when pension amounts and the amount of the guaranteed income supplement are set, so that people can enjoy a decent, dignified retirement.

It is very disturbing that a government that has made such bad decisions in recent years about inconsequential issues is not putting money where it is most needed. It is not putting money where it could help seniors, whom I suspect we all love, live out their remaining years much more comfortably.

When we say invisible work, we are talking about people who are forced to leave their employers because they cannot take care of a sick parent at the same time. I am 59 years old and am part of what is called the sandwich generation. In front of me, I have my mother, and until a few years ago, there was my grandmother. Behind me, I have my sons and grandchildren. The person who is best able to take care of all these people is the one in the middle because she has the best salary and the best job and can take a leave of absence to care for her children, grandchildren, mother and grandmother, do the shopping, and make sure that her parents have all they need.

● (1705)

If I were not able to do what I am doing for my parents, I would have to find someone and that would probably be very expensive. If I were not able to care for my grandchildren when my sons cannot do it, we would also have to hire someone, and that would be very expensive. However, because I am able to do it, or at least can arrange to do it, it is not considered real work because it is not paid.

For me, it is doable. For some other women or people who have a job, for example, in customer service, the restaurant industry, hotels, grocery stores and so forth, it is much more difficult. They are offered split shifts and part-time work because employers cannot be sure they will be available on a regular basis when they have to take care of their families. It has always been the women who are called upon to care for the family.

Even today, in 2009, it is women who are expected to take care of the family. When we get older, we realize all the sacrifices we made

for our children. We find ourselves alone, abandoned, isolated and virtually ignored by society because we are 80, 85 or 90 years old. We realize we are not worth much anymore. We do not really know the older people around us.

A few years ago, I had a chance to do a really exciting exercise with high school students in grades 9 to 11 and some older people more than 75 years of age. I asked the students to interview the older people and make a video recording. The students were supposed to get the older people to tell their life stories and find out who they really were so that the students would learn that behind every old man or old woman is an interesting person who really accomplished something.

The young people were completely amazed at what they discovered. They met a woman who had been the first woman to work in radio at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. She was the first female producer on the French side of the CBC. They met another woman who was one of the pioneers at the École des beaux-arts in Montreal where women had not been admitted before that. They met one of the first women university graduates to become a lawyer. I watched the eyes of those young men and women as they interviewed the seniors and suddenly discovered that they were real people. They discovered that those people had a rich past and had made enormous contributions to our society.

And yet those people were living in a little room, in a bachelor or one-bedroom apartment with very little, because at that age they were destitute and had no money. They had no wealth and they had to pay constant attention to what they were buying.

I often walk around the places where the poorest people go because I think it is important to go there too. I often go to second-hand stores and places like the Salvation Army. Poor people go there to buy clothing and other things. I think it is important to go there and I often meet senior citizens in those places. They do not have the option of being able to buy new clothes. But they still go shopping for clothes, because they have their pride, they take pride in their appearance, and they still want to be well dressed. They want to look tidy and well put together. I am always very distressed to see how many seniors there are in those places.

Young people go there by choice, because they can find clothes that are a little different, sometimes from the 1960s. But senior citizens do not do it by choice.

● (1710)

When we fail to consider the rich history and heritage that senior citizens who are still living today represent, and we fail to show consideration for these people, it means we have very little consideration for ourselves. We do not have much consideration for ourselves or self-esteem or self-respect if we do not respect the people who came before us.

I want us to do our utmost to make sure that women and men, from their start in life, have access to a living wage, that women and men who are growing old have access to a decent pension, a decent income, and a guaranteed income supplement that means something.

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I also hope to see an increase in the guaranteed income supplement to compensate for fixed costs, which are constantly rising, and also to see, as my colleague from Alfred-Pellan called for in a motion, that the spouses of senior citizens who die are not left by the wayside for the first six months and we continue to pay them the same pension. After all, those people lived in the same home or apartment and the costs they have to pay are still the same. And yet their pension is immediately cut because they are considered to be living as single people. We have to show more consideration and better judgment in how we treat our senior citizens.

Madam Speaker, I see that you are rising. I could say so much more, but I have so little time.

• (1715)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I am sorry to have to interrupt debate on the business of supply, but it being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and the recorded division is deemed to have been demanded and deferred until Tuesday, June 16, 2009, at the end of government orders.

[English]

Mr. Bill Siksay: Madam Speaker, I think if you were to seek it, you would find unanimous consent to see the clock as 5:30 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

RENEWABLE ENERGY

The House resumed from May 6, 2009, consideration of the motion.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am delighted to rise here today to speak to Motion No. 295 to support the renewable energy sector and Canada's participation within the International Renewable Energy Agency. The motion moved by the hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville reads as follows:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should increase its support of Canada's renewable energy sector, allow our country to participate in the worldwide effort to develop renewable energy sources and enlist Canada as a full member of the International Renewable Energy Agency.

I am delighted to take part in this debate. First of all, I have always believed that any policy to fight climate change should be based on two things: reducing greenhouse gas emissions at the source, combined with an excellent policy based on energy efficiency. This motion primarily addresses the first aspect of this key issue.

We are saying we have to invest hugely in renewable energies because we must reduce our dependence on oil as quickly as possible in the coming years. We can do it first off by "decarbonizing" our economy. Reducing our dependence means investing massively in renewable energies. Hydroelectricity, geothermics and wind power are examples of measures available to the government. It could encourage them by using regulatory and fiscal instruments.

We must remember that, historically, the federal government has always use tax incentives to fund projects. It has done so through Natural Resources Canada programs. With the wind power production incentive program, for example, the federal government decided to fund kilowatt hours produced by wind power. It does so to make these renewable energies competitive and to lend a hand to the industries that need it and have demonstrated in recent years, that they can be a powerful springboard in revitalizing our economies, in shifting to green, in creating jobs and in repositioning Canada on the international stage.

This is what the UN said nearly a year ago, when it proposed to western countries that they create this green new deal and change our approach in these sectors in order to revive the world economy. The first part of this motion serves, therefore, to encourage the government to increase its support for the Canadian renewable energies sector.

But we have to look at the way this government operates. We had a fine demonstration today—the Minister of Natural Resources said in private that the government and the Minister of the Environment encouraged the tar sands industry, no less. As the minister indicated in private, they take financial resources that should be allocated to renewable energies, specifically to wind energy in this instance, and transfer them to the tar sands industry, which is making huge profits.

So, the issue is not that subsidies should be eliminated, since the oil industry does not necessarily receive subsidies, but such things as tax incentives given through accelerated write-offs must be quickly done away with.

• (1720)

The Government of Canada has to understand that it must stop providing this type of assistance, these tax incentives, and transfer them to renewable energy industries and the environmental industry. This is what should happen. The Bloc is not alone in saying this. Reports by the OECD have shown it. They aim to put in place what we call an environmental tax policy, one that will encourage these industries, so they can reposition themselves and be able to create jobs.

Second, it should allow our country to participate in the worldwide effort to develop renewable energy sources and enlist Canada as a full member of the International Renewable Energy Agency. This is important. In fact, historically, as far as energy is concerned, the Government of Canada has often had to reach decisions with regard to a variety of platforms, associations and agencies. But there is something quite incredible here. The International Renewable Energy Agency came into being on January 26, 2009. As of today, 78 nations have joined, 28 in Africa, 27 in Europe, 16 in Asia and 7 in Latin America. The Government of Canada is missing. How can it be that Canada is not a member, when in November 2007 it showed no hesitation in joining an initiative, known as the nuclear club, which is a world partnership for nuclear energy? Canadian opted instead for membership in a partnership for the development of an energy sector that reflects regional interests, no more and no less. Canada currently has 22 operating reactors. This energy repositioning need not involve the development of nuclear energy, instead, it must be based on the development of renewable forms of energy.

Canada needs to take part in these international bodies, these forums for technology exchanges and transfers to the developing world. On the North American front, we must not merely let our neighbours in the U.S. invest huge amounts per capita, four times more than the Canadian government's per capita investment, in renewable energies. Since the change of government in the U.S., we can see that there is an administration in place to the south that has understood that energy efficiency and investment in renewable energies are first and foremost an economic and environmental issue. This is what will help us build a sustainable economy.

But what has the government decided to do? It has decided to invest and continue funding and helping an industry that is contributing to the carbonization of our economy. This is not the right strategic choice for Canada, and we have strategic choices to make. We have a choice, because we know that demand will rise significantly in the coming years, not only in Canada, but also in the United States. What does that mean? It means that we have to curb our insatiable hunger for energy, but at the same time, we have to develop opportunities. That is clear. What choices do we have? Should we choose to triple or quadruple the number of barrels of oil produced per day by an industry in western Canada, or should we take advantage of the potential offered by the wind, the sun and underground heat? The answer is obvious.

When we look at the decisions the government has made on the international stage, we can see that it has decided to do two things with regard to energy: first, revive the nuclear industry and second, favour the oil sands industry.

• (1725)

In closing, we support this motion, not only because it is part of a policy to fight climate change, but because it is also a way to make a green shift.

[English]

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak to the motion of the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville. It reads:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should increase its support of Canada's renewable energy sector, allow our country to participate in the worldwide

Private Members' Business

effort to develop renewable energy sources and enlist Canada as a full member of the International Renewable Energy Agency.

I am pleased that in this corner of the House we are supporting the motion, but I am doubly pleased, I suppose, because I had also tabled a motion on the order paper, dealing with the establishment of the International Renewable Energy Agency, IRENA. I know that the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville is very interested in that particular organization and its establishment.

My motion is a little bit different. It focuses more on IRENA itself. I will just read it into the record. The motion I had proposed says:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should: (a) consider that the promotion of renewable energy sources requires new institutional measures in the field of international cooperation; (b) welcome the initiative by the International Parliamentary Forum on Renewable Energy and the German, Danish, and Spanish governments for the establishment and work of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA); and (c) support the establishment and work of the IRENA by becoming a member of that Agency.

In my motion I chose to focus specifically on the development of this new renewable energy agency, which would work to ensure that renewable energy was at the forefront of international co-operation and international work around energy issues.

The International Renewable Energy Agency was officially established in Bonn, Germany, on January 26 of this year. The mandate of IRENA is that it aspires to become the main driving force for promoting a rapid transition towards the widespread and sustainable use of renewable energy on a global scale. So there is a sense of urgency and speed in the mandate of this new agency.

It looks to provide practical advice and support for both industrialized and developing countries, thereby helping to improve frameworks and build capacity. It also intends to facilitate access to all relevant information on renewable energy issues.

When looking at the establishment of IRENA, the background issues that the organizers and the promoters of this agency elucidate in their materials are that they note we face monumental challenges, challenges of global warming, of the waning of natural resources, of explosions in population growth, of increasing energy demand, rising energy prices and unequal distribution of energy sources. All those factors, they note, contribute to the urgent need to transform the energy sector, which primarily relies on fossil fuels, to one that uses renewable energy and energy-efficient measures.

That is where they see the need for this new international agency, the International Renewable Energy Agency, and they would see that a major task of the agency is to develop comprehensive solutions to the challenges that I just noted, such as fostering all types of renewable energy and considering various renewable energy policies at the local, regional and national levels. They believe that IRENA, in fulfilling its work, should consider specific environmental, economic and socio-cultural conditions of its members.

The active involvement of stakeholders from the energy industry, academia, civil society and other institutions is very important to the success of this new agency to make sure that it is able to implement policies, and policies that are enduring and provide solutions.

Royal Assent

The agency would intend to regularly consult and co-operate with organizations and networks already engaged in the field of renewable energy, in order to complement and pool their work resources, creating added value in that way.

So it is an ambitious agenda, but one that is certainly timely. I think in most corners of the House we appreciate the need to move away from fossil fuels, the fact that we have to and that needs to be done in an urgent way, and that looking more carefully at and implementing renewable energy alternatives is very important.

I heard about IRENA and the move to establish IRENA through the Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament, or PNND. An active member of PNND is a German member of Parliament, and he has taken a very serious interest in promoting this alternative.

● (1730)

His name is Dr. Hermann Scheer. He is a member of the German parliament. He came to his concern about renewable energy through concerns that he had about the nuclear energy industry. Not all members of PNND are concerned about nuclear energy. Some members of that organization believe that nuclear energy has a place as one of our energy sources.

However, Dr. Scheer is someone who believed that promoting a renewable energy agency would have a positive effect in the world and have an effect that is related to the use of nuclear energy and the commitments to nuclear non-proliferation. So he became one of the key promoters of this idea.

The Parliamentary Network for Nuclear Disarmament was also involved in promoting and at least advertising his efforts in that regard. So that is where my interest in this as a member of the Canadian section of PNND began.

As I said, this organization had its founding meeting in January 2009, and a number of nations signed on at that time. If we look at its website today, we will see that 96 nations have signed on to IRENA, this International Renewable Energy Agency. I think when we first began debate on this motion, there were 78 nations. So that number has gone up since then.

Unfortunately, Canada is not one of the nations that has been involved. Canada did not become involved in any of the preparatory meetings. Canada was not at the founding meeting, and Canada has not become a signatory to the development of this new agency. I think that is rather tragic when we see the importance of promoting renewable energy and when we see the continuing failure of the government to appreciate the need for renewable energy and the need to ensure that renewable energy is developed here in Canada and around the world.

Canada should be part of this international effort. Canadians have something to contribute to this agency and to the goal of ensuring that renewable energy replaces fossil fuel as the source of our energy here in Canada and around the world. We do need to be part of that organization. It would be good for Canada to be in at the ground, at the beginnings of that organization, although that opportunity is quickly disappearing.

I think it is very important that Canada reconsider its position. I hope the government will do that and ensure that Canada signs on soon to this proposal and becomes one of the countries that helps chart the course of this new agency.

We have seen other international energy agencies. We know there is the International Atomic Energy Agency. We know there is the International Energy Agency, composed mainly of OECD countries, that has had a major interest in fossil fuels. But even there, the International Energy Agency is moving to consider renewable energy as an important feature of the current discussion.

Those agencies have been set up and functioning for many years, but there is, I think, an important space in that discussion in international co-operation to have an agency that looks to renewable energy specifically and has that as its particular mandate, and it certainly is a very timely issue.

We know the renewable energy sources of wind energy, solar energy, and geothermal energy have great potential here in Canada and around the world. We know retrofit programs have great potential here in Canada and around the world. We know renewable energy and retrofitting have immediate effects. We know they have been tested, they are effective and proven, and they have known results. This direction is certainly one that would be important for us to undertake and for our government to undertake.

We are concerned when we see the redirection of moneys away from wind energy and towards tar sands and old fossil fuel solutions and believe this is exactly the wrong direction to be taking.

Again, I am glad to be part of this discussion. I am glad to be able to support the motion before us and to say very clearly that support for renewable energy and for this new International Renewable Energy Agency is something that Canada should be involved in, and I look forward to voting in favour of this motion.

* * *

● (1735)

ROYAL ASSENT

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I have the honour to inform the House that a communication has been received as follows:

Rideau Hall

Ottawa

June 11, 2009

Mr. Speaker:

I have the honour to inform you that the Honourable Rosalie Silberman Abella, Puisne Judge of the Supreme Court of Canada, in her capacity as Deputy of the Governor General, signified royal assent by written declaration to the bills listed in the Schedule to this letter on the 11th day of June, 2009 at 3:56 p.m.

Yours sincerely,

Sheila-Marie Cook

Secretary to the Governor General and Herald Chancellor

The schedule indicates the bills assented to were Bill S-2, An Act to amend the Customs Act; Bill C-3, An Act to amend the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act; and Bill C-28, An Act to amend the Cree-Naskapi (of Quebec) Act.

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

RENEWABLE ENERGY

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on May 6 when we held our first debate on the motion introduced by the hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, he urged the House and the government to ensure that our country became a full member of the new International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA). He also asked the government to increase its support for the renewable energy sector in Canada, starting with the expansion of the ecoENERGY program.

During the debate on May 6, my colleagues the hon. member for Trois-Rivières, on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, and the hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona, on behalf of the New Democratic Party, presented the reasons why their respective parties would support the motion. I want to thank them for that. I also want to thank the hon. members for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie and Burnaby—Douglas for their contributions today.

Two Conservatives, the hon. member for Saskatoon—Humboldt and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour expressed the government's view. They said that the government was not planning on joining IRENA and that it was satisfied with the efforts it was making in regard to renewable energy in Canada.

I want to thank my colleagues in the Conservative Party for expressing what the government's view was last month. However, this view seems untenable to me and I still have some hope that the government will see the light and change its mind. Perhaps I can use my remaining minutes to try to persuade it

I am going to examine, one after the other, the arguments advanced by my colleague from Saskatoon—Humboldt on May 6.

• (1740)

[English]

First, our colleague across the way expressed the government's fear that IRENA might duplicate the work of other organizations to which Canada belongs and which it supports financially. As it happens, many countries that are also members of these organizations have joined IRENA. Here are a few examples.

The member for Saskatoon—Humboldt pointed out that countries such as Germany, Spain, Austria, Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands, as well as Canada, are members of the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership. All these countries have also joined IRENA.

The member opposite also referred to the Global Bioenergy Partnership. As it happens, at least eight of the 25 international members of this partnership are already members of IRENA.

The member also mentioned the International Energy Agency. I am sure he will be happy to learn that of the International Energy Agency's 28 member countries, 14 of them, half of the member countries, have already joined IRENA. I would also remind him, as was said on May 6, that the IEA's mandate is to deal mainly with long-standing non-renewable technologies, with a strong focus on

nuclear and fossil fuels. It currently spends only 2% of its budget on renewable energy activities.

The member for Saskatoon—Humboldt also mentioned other institutions such as Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, APEC, and the United Nations Environment Programme. I will point out that although they have recently increased their very modest involvement in this sector, thus recognizing its growing importance, these organizations only have a peripheral interest in renewable energy.

Overall, these different agencies welcome IRENA as a valuable addition for cohesion, focus, and for that matter, momentum. For example, Dr. Marianne Osterkorn, director general of the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership, stated:

IRENA will no doubt become a heavy-weight facilitator providing policy advice to governments and paving the way for technology transfer. This will complement REEEP's efforts in working with the private sector and governments to accelerate the market for both renewables and energy efficiency.

[Translation]

Consequently, the risk that the work done by IRENA will be duplicated by other organizations interested in renewable energy is minimal.

Quite to the contrary, IRENA is the only organization whose official role is to facilitate and assist with the planning, coordination and implementation of international activities to introduce renewable energies. Joint action is needed, now more than ever.

If the government really wants Canada to be part of the key role that IRENA will play and benefit as well, it must allow our country to become an active member, with all its technological expertise and international experience.

[English]

The government claims to support an integrated approach to energy issues. This is precisely what IRENA offers and purports to do, but at an international level. My point is that IRENA is more likely to succeed with Canada than without Canada, to help the world to benefit from the potential of the rapidly growing renewable energy sector, to provide, for example, climate change mitigation, energy security and thousands and thousands of jobs.

The government's other argument is that key countries such as the United States, Japan, Russia, Brazil and China have not yet joined IRENA.

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• (1745)

[Translation]

That is very interesting. During our last debate on May 6, IRENA had 78 member countries. Since that time, 18 others have joined bringing membership to a total of 96. China is not a member of IRENA—at least not yet—but India is. The United States and Great Britain have expressed an interest in joining. The House of Representatives has even passed a resolution to that effect. What a difference with a democratic government.

As for Australia, its Prime Minister has announced that it plans on joining the agency. One thing is certain, IRENA is here to stay. It will survive and prosper. Developed and developing countries will join, whether they are minor or major players on the energy scene, producers or consumers of fossil fuels. Canada will also have to join. The question is when. Will it be long after other countries have joined, or as soon as possible? Too late to influence its orientation or in time to gain the maximum benefit?

I would now like to address the other aspect of the government's response to the motion on support for the renewable energy sector. The government claims to be doing enough to promote renewable energy in Canada. They are completely out of touch. It is as though they were from another planet. The expression "renewable energy" does not appear once in the 2009 Conservative budget. According to the Pembina Institute, only 5% of the stimulus funds for the next two years are earmarked for clean and renewable energy. Per capita allocations to renewable energy were 14 times greater in the last U.S. budget than the Conservative government's allocations.

[English]

To conclude, 14 times more money is being spent in the United States than in Canada on renewable energy. Talk about a risk of flight of capital to the United States from our already scarce venture capital funds that want to invest in green and clean technology. In fact, when compared to European nations and the U.S.A., the investment in renewable energy by the Conservative government is simply—there is no other word—ludicrous. It did the absolute minimum over the last three years.

On that note, I would like again to congratulate our former leader, my fine colleague from the fine riding of Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, for presenting such a well thought out motion which speaks to the very DNA of Canadian society, that is, our multilateral traditions in joining IRENA and leading the world toward a clean and green, lean and mean technological future where we all win.

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the member for Ottawa South would have thanked me, as he has his other colleagues, had I spoken before him.

It is a privilege to speak to this motion which was tabled by the hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville.

This Conservative government is a strong supporter of renewable energy, and we have been strategic and prudent in our decisions about how to invest effectively in the development of renewable energy both at home and abroad.

Canada's leadership in renewable energy is well known around the world. For example, Canada participates in many key initiatives,

including the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership, the Global Bioenergy Partnership, the Asia-Pacific Partnership, the APEC Energy Working Group, and the International Energy Agency, otherwise known as IEA.

In fact, among our activities under the IEA, Canada is currently participating in eight IEA implementation agreements involving a broad range of renewable energies, such as bioenergy, ocean energy, photovoltaics, renewable technologies, and solar, wind and hydro power.

There is no question that Canada has been extremely active and stands at the forefront of renewable energy. While our international commitments are strong, we have been careful and selective in making them. We have joined many international initiatives, but not all of them, mainly due to concerns about duplication and overlap, and ensuring that we make the best and most effective use of our resources, both human and financial.

Since the International Renewable Energy Agency, IRENA, was first proposed in 2004, many other initiatives have been launched, and Canada is a full participant in most of them. Currently, several key G8 partners—the U.S., Japan and Russia—have not joined IRENA, nor have the significant emerging economies of China and Brazil.

Our government has already accomplished much on this file. Since first elected, we have moved aggressively forward in advancing the use of renewable energy in Canada. As a result, Canada's electricity supply mix is one of the cleanest and most renewable in the world, and over the past 10 years we have seen exponential growth in renewable energy in Canada.

Our commitment remains unchanged. This government intends to see that 90% of Canada's electricity will be provided by non-emitting sources, such as hydro, nuclear, clean coal or wind power, by 2020. Renewable energy will play a key part in achieving this objective. For instance, wind energy has become the fastest growing source of electricity generation in Canada and it is expected to experience significant further growth during the next decade.

Another non-fossil fuel energy source, hydroelectricity, accounts for nearly 60% of Canada's total electricity generation making Canada the world's second largest hydro power producer. These and other clean renewable energy technologies, such as solar, biomass, and geothermal, will continue to contribute substantially to our economic growth and to our objectives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

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We owe it to future generations to take action on climate change now. Renewable energy is a large part of the Government of Canada's plan to address climate change. That is why to further support Canada's leadership in clean energy, budget 2009 provides \$1 billion over five years to support clean energy technologies. This includes \$150 million over five years for research, \$850 million over five years for the development and demonstration of promising technologies, including large scale carbon capture and storage projects. This support is expected to generate a total investment in clean technologies of at least \$2.5 billion over the next five years.

Energy production is the backbone of Canada's economy. It has long contributed significantly to the quality of life of all Canadians. Before the economic downturn, Canada's energy production was approaching \$100 billion annually. However, the reality is that energy production and use are also the sources of most of Canada's air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. The task at hand is twofold: to clean up the production in the use of fossil fuels; and to increase the use of clean energy by helping Canadians use more energy efficiently, boost renewable energy supplies and develop cleaner energy technologies.

• (1750)

Through our eco-energy for renewable heat program, we are supporting the uptake of renewable energy by industry, business and institutions. It is expanding the use of renewable energy for space heating and hot water. Our government is also encouraging Canadians to install renewable energy technologies in their homes by providing eco-energy grants to homeowners for the installation of solar hot water systems and ground or water source heat pumps.

Our recent economic action plan includes new measures totalling almost \$2.4 billion that further increases our support for a cleaner and more sustainable environment that will help Canada meet our climate change objectives. The plan provides another \$1 billion for a green infrastructure fund that will support modern energy transmission lines and sustainable energy projects.

Canada's economic action plan includes an additional \$300 million for our eco-energy retrofit homes initiative to help an additional 200,000 homes increase their energy efficiency and reduce their energy costs.

This mix of initiatives is bold and strategic and positions us well as we move into the next decade and increase the use of renewable and clean electricity in Canada. As we look to the future, we will continue to work with industry and other stakeholders to discuss other ways to further advance renewable energy in Canada.

The record is clear. The Government of Canada has been instrumental in the success of advancing renewable energy. In the fight against climate change, Canada is not acting alone but in full co-operation and coordination with other industrialized countries.

• (1755)

The Deputy Speaker: There being no one further debate, we will go to the hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartier for his five minute right of reply.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Bloc Québécois member for

Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, the NDP member for Burnaby—Douglas, my colleague from Ottawa South and the member for Kenora for their contributions so far.

[*English*]

I thank the member for Kenora for his contribution, but he is only repeating what was said a month ago as if nobody has spoken in the House since then about this issue.

The government has two points against the motion. The government does not want to be part of IRENA, the new international renewable energy agency, because it claims it duplicates organizations that already exist. The government claims that it is doing enough about renewable energy and feels it does not need to add to that.

All colleagues who have spoken about these points have made it very clear how wrong the government is in its assertions. I do not want to repeat many of them, but it is clear that IRENA is welcomed by the very organizations that the government claims will be duplicated and overlapped. They are welcoming IRENA as an umbrella institution that will coordinate the booming file of the renewable energy sector. This argument does not hold.

More countries are coming to IRENA one after the other. Why would Canada be the last? Why is the government always a laggard instead of a leader?

Now I will focus on the point made by my hon. colleague that the government is doing enough about renewable energy. We need to add to what the government is doing.

Of the \$3.6 billion eco-energy initiative that the Conservative government launched in 2007, most of it were programs brought in by previous Liberal governments that the Conservatives merely rebranded. The Conservatives are only riding on our coattails.

Moreover, most of the clean technology investments, which the government referred to in its 2009 budget, have nothing to do with renewable energy. The budget says that we will see \$2.5 billion contributed to clean energy over the next five years. How much of this will be renewable? Most of the \$850 million allocated to development and demonstration will be spent on large scale carbon capture and storage projects. This is not a renewable energy solution.

The government wants to reach a target of producing 90% of Canada's electricity from non-emitting sources by 2020. It is 73% today.

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It seems that the government wants to increase non-emitting sources through nuclear and CCS for coal. That is why the bulk of federal energy investment in the 2009 federal budget went to nuclear power and CCS, not to renewables.

To reach the government's goal in the timeframe noted, 12 years, renewable energy has to be a much larger part of the mix. One cannot build a new nuclear power plant for 2020 and we do not know when CCS will be implemented on a large scale. It may not be before 2025, while a wind farm can be built in less than one year, and many wind projects are shovel ready.

• (1800)

[Translation]

The government is still refusing to extend the ecoENERGY program, its modest renewable energy support program, even though it is perfectly clear that the government has known for months that this program will run out of money by the fall. The government knows that. It must take action and renew its ecoENERGY program.

During our last debate in May, the price of a barrel of oil was \$54 U.S. Now it is \$72 U.S., and the global recession is still in full swing. Just imagine how much damage our fossil fuel dependency will cause once the recession has run its course. The time for renewable energy is at hand. But will Canada be in a position to benefit?

[English]

We cannot turn our backs on an industry ready to create jobs as well as clean energy. Since our last debate, the UN reported that renewable power investments overtook investments in power generation from coal and gas.

[Translation]

Canada must begin its green revolution. This is about our children's future.

I am counting on the government to change its mind and sign on to IRENA.

The Deputy Speaker: The time provided for debate has expired.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion, the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, June 17, 2009, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

[English]

Shall I see the clock as 6:30 p.m.?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[Translation]

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on March 27, I had the opportunity to question the Minister of Canadian Heritage about CBC funding. The minister merely gave partisan and repetitive answers providing no reassurance to Canadians about funding for the corporation.

The Conservatives may not care about preserving the corporation's mission, but citizens do. On May 11, *Le Journal de Montréal* published the results of the CROP survey conducted for the Fédération nationale des communications:

—89% of Quebecers “agree” or “strongly agree” with the fact that the CBC is an important vehicle for Canadian and Quebec culture and that its mission must be fully protected and 81% feel that it is “fairly important” or “very important” that the government ensure its development by increasing its funding if necessary.

How can this government be so out of touch with reality and the wishes of Canadians?

The Conservatives have slashed funding for our national broadcaster. In addition to its refusal to advance \$125 million, the government has not yet released the \$60 million the corporation counts on every year to balance its budget. Consequently, the corporation must now cut 800 jobs, close stations in many regions and decrease its production.

As if that were not enough, the government has asked the CBC to conduct a strategic analysis of its spending, which could result in \$56 million in additional cuts in 2010-11.

The well-known former news anchor, Bernard Derome, blamed the Conservative government's attitude toward the CBC, saying that more and more Canadians were getting worried about the current situation, which was threatening the development of francophone culture in Canada. All the Prime Minister's Office could say in response was that this proved that the CBC was anti-Conservative.

In response to Mr. Derome's call to action, a group of people got together to oppose, with public support, the Conservative government's decision to abandon the CBC to its fate. This group, SOS Radio-Canada, is one of the driving forces behind the campaign to save the CBC. In addition to the support campaigns, petitions and Facebook groups, the Syndicat des communications de Radio-Canada has launched a campaign entitled “I am, we are for better support for Radio-Canada”.

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What do these Canadians want? It is clear: to maintain news coverage and national, regional, and local programming in Quebec; to maintain French-language news and programming in francophone minority communities outside Quebec; and to maintain the corporation's 2008 staffing and service levels.

On March 31, we, the Liberals, introduced a motion that was adopted by a vote of 136 to 126. This motion recognized the indispensable role of the CBC in providing national, regional, and local programming including news coverage and services to linguistic minorities throughout Canada and urged the government to provide the bridge financing the corporation requires to maintain 2008 staffing and service levels.

We need to have the courage to talk openly and honestly about the future of the CBC. Clearly, the Conservatives lack courage. Instead, they are using the economic crisis as an excuse to attack this national institution and deny it the funding it needs.

When will the Conservatives give the CBC the stable funding it so badly needs?

• (1805)

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, this is proof why it is wonderful to have a selective memory in this House.

The member, who was once a part of a Liberal government, likely does not remember that back in 1993 and then in 1997, when the Liberals played a familiar tune, they said, "If elected we will provide more and stable funding to the CBC. That is our word to the CBC".

What did they do?

• (1810)

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Nothing.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: They did less than nothing. They cut funding to the CBC by some \$400 million. Four thousand jobs disappeared. That is the Liberal record.

The member voted in favour of Canada's economic action plan and that was a smart move. It was a good thing he did. As we can see today, 80% of the stimulus measures in Canada's economic action plan have been implemented. We are moving forward. We are getting things done for Canadians.

What else was in that economic action plan? There was record funding for the CBC. That is what was in there. Perhaps the member did not read it. It was a heck of a plan. In there was a lot of money for the CBC, more than \$1.1 billion. That is one thousand, one hundred million dollars. If we distributed that money to everybody in Lakefield, Ontario, they would all have half a million dollars in their bank accounts. That is a lot of money.

The people in Lakefield would like that, but the people at the CBC are using it to produce shows that are in the public interest, fulfilling their mandate with more than \$1.1 billion. That is how much support our government has put behind the CBC and Radio-Canada in this country.

I have said many times in this House that the CBC is a Conservative Party creation. Of course it is. The Conservative Party brought the CBC and Radio-Canada into existence. It is the Liberal Party that wanted to shut it down. In fact, former leader Pierre Trudeau said that if the lights went off at the CBC, nobody would notice. That is their record.

I could take some criticism on this from some parties, but not the Liberal Party. It is the height of hypocrisy. What it did to the CBC was shameful. Our party stands four-square behind the CBC.

We are doing a study right now at the heritage committee on the future of broadcasting. We have found that all broadcasters in over-the-air broadcasting are having some difficulties because the advertising revenues are not what they normally are. That has also hit the CBC, but what we have done amid this crisis is put the money behind the CBC. We have provided the CBC with funding.

Is the CBC experiencing challenges? Sure it is, but so is everybody in broadcasting and so are Canadians right at home. It is a common theme that we hear from the opposition: spend, spend, spend. That is why I believe the Liberal leader when he says, "We will have to raise taxes". Of course the Liberals will because all they come forward with are spending proposals. That is what the member is saying. He says, "Spend more money. Throw more money at the problem and it will just go away".

We are committed to getting value for tax dollars in this country. That is the Conservative promise to Canadians. We stand behind the CBC, but we will not spend frivolously.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Speaker, I believe my colleague from the Conservative Party is suffering from selective memory. He has forgotten that, when the Liberals took over in 1993, they inherited a disastrous financial situation left behind by the previous, Conservative, government.

Clearly, the Conservatives are using the present crisis to muzzle the CBC something they have wanted to do for a long time. The Conservatives say that funding the CBC is a waste of taxpayers' money and that it should broadcast only in those regions where it does not compete with private broadcasters.

The government has said on a number of occasions that it has increased the CBC budget every year, but this is false. The corporation's annual reports and the main estimates clearly demonstrate that the government has been cutting the CBC budget ever since it has been in power.

CBC's annual expenditures reveal that, during the Conservative government's first year in power, that is 2006-07, it cut funding by \$32 million. That year, there were—

The Deputy Speaker: I regret that I must interrupt the hon. member.

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

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[English]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Mr. Speaker, the statements by the member are patently false. Anybody who can use an adding machine or perhaps a calculator would know that 1.1 is more than 1.

It is certainly more than what the Liberal Party put in place. That is what we have done. We have provided more funding to the CBC, stable funding to the CBC. The CBC has been the recipient of public funds for over seven years. That is pretty stable. However, one thing that I do not have a selective memory about is the Liberal record. In 1993 the Liberals promised more money and delivered less.

By the way, if they want to talk deficits, let us talk Trudeau, with the highest percentage of GDP to debt. The budgets he brought forward were awful, a disgrace. He was leading this country down a road to destruction, but thank goodness some Conservatives got in there and got this country back on the path, but we did not cut health care funding. We did not cut education funding.

That is what the Liberals did. They cut transfers to the provinces. They also cut funding to the CBC and 4,000 jobs were lost at the CBC. The CBC has never recovered from the Liberal record of shame.

[Translation]

ARTS AND CULTURE

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on April 3, 2009 we learned that the part-time component of the second language assistant program Accent had been done away with, indeed eliminated without any warning by the Reform Conservative government.

Through this program, university students were hired as language assistants and organized a variety of cultural activities for students of French language and culture in minority communities, or for students in French immersion, depending on their location.

In 2008, 390 students became language assistants. The program worked well. It helped many people learning French to improve their knowledge through the cultural support the Accent assistants provided.

The program was appreciated equally by students and their parents and by the schools. It did not cost much: only \$2.6 million annually.

Then, boom, the Reform Conservative government hypocritically and surreptitiously abolished the Accent program, with no transparency whatsoever. This program was greatly appreciated, in part as a tool to counteract assimilation and the loss of French in favour of English unilingualism.

There is so much to be done to fight the assimilation of French by English that every little bit helps. Abolishing the Accent program is just one more backward step in the battle against the Canadian cancer that is assimilation of the French fact.

The president of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, Lise Routhier-Boudreau, criticized the Reform Conservative government's lack of transparency with respect to this cut. She said, "Lack of clarity in the way the government does things is a shame, a real shame".

On April 30, Claire Trépanier, interim director of the Bureau des affaires francophones et francophiles at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia told the Standing Committee on Official Languages how she thought the Accent program could be made more effective. She said:

There's already the Accent program at the federal level. It's a student monitoring program. The students we sent on mobility in third year to Laval University, for example, also benefited from the Accent program. We could imagine a combination of those two programs in which the student, through the Explore program, studies his second language, but can also work in his mother tongue, perhaps on a part-time basis.

Comments like that belong in the "solutions" category, not the "what can we do to get rid of a program that resists Reform Conservative assimilation" category.

When my Bloc colleague, the member for Rivière-du-Nord, told Ms. Trépanier that the Accord language assistant program had been cut, Ms. Trépanier said, without a moment's hesitation, "It must be restored".

This is further proof that the elimination of the Accent program is another one of the federal government's very bad ideological moves.

• (1815)

[English]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was an interesting point brought forward by the member. Unfortunately, it is not the point that he actually suggested that he wanted to attend here for the adjournment debate this evening. What he actually wanted to talk about was international travel, but then he came in and talked about something that was kind of entirely different from international travel. So, that is interesting.

However, I am here to talk about support for the arts and I am happy to discuss support for the arts. We have the member for Lévis—Bellechasse here. Do members know why he is here? Because he supports the arts in Quebec. He strongly believes that the arts is important to the cultural fabric of Quebec, just like it is important to the cultural fabric of this great country.

No government has put more support behind the arts than this government. Whether it is our support for festivals, whether it is our support to the Canada Council for the Arts, whether it is our support to cultural spaces, this government put more money behind the arts than any government in history.

And do members know what was really missing? The Bloc came forward with a couple of economic proposals, one in November and another one I believe in late April, and the Bloc did not mention the arts at all. The Bloc never mentioned the CBC or Radio-Canada. Apparently it is really important to the Bloc. I am glad the Bloc is standing up for national institutions. I think my colleagues agree with that.

We believe in a strong Canada, and that is what the CBC and Radio-Canada bring to Canada, but we also believe in the arts. That is why we have put so much money behind the arts and that is why we stand four-square behind all those who make Canada so culturally vibrant, who give us this unique identity in the world, who are really trendsetters in the world. We look at Canadians who are so successful on the world scene, whether it is in acting or in singing or indeed in drama, and in dance, we know that Les Grands Ballets, for example, is going to receive \$2.7 million this year from this government, more money than it has ever received, and I am proud of that. As it is going around and entertaining audiences, not just in Canada but internationally, Les Grands Ballets is representing Canada, and we are so proud.

I guess perhaps the reason why we are on a different question, a question entirely different from what the member suggested that he would talk about is because the Bloc has not been talking a lot about the arts. We came out with our economic action plan, and I alluded to it earlier, and today it is 80% implemented. I will tell members that the record of the Department of Canadian Heritage is outstanding in implementing our economic action plan. We are getting the money out the door and we are supporting artists with it.

However, the reason why Bloc members are not asking that question is because they do not like the answer. They do not like it when they are being called on the fact that they forgot about artists in Quebec. The leader of the Bloc Québécois is going to receive \$20 million of support for the arts in his own riding this year from this government. And he forgot about them in his two economic statements. No wonder they do not want to talk about the arts anymore. When it comes to arts in Canada, this party remembered them, that party voted against them.

• (1820)

The Deputy Speaker: I should perhaps inform the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage that as far as the Speaker is aware, notice was given for the subject which the member for Gatineau raised. The subject matter that was announced earlier today, when the late shows were announced, is the topic that he raised in his original question for which he submitted a request for an adjournment proceeding question.

So, there may be some miscommunication, but as far as the Table and the Speaker are aware, this was the subject matter that the member for Gatineau was going to raise.

The hon. member for Gatineau.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Speaker, I did inform the Conservative Party yesterday that I would be speaking about the Accent program. I told his colleague from Saint Boniface who spoke to the member for Peterborough. There is no reason to not be ready. They need only do their homework.

The Accent program fostered the mobility of students throughout Quebec and Canada. Its objective was to help French-language schools in minority settings and French immersion schools to improve their students' knowledge of French. The Accent program combined language and culture in French learning. According to André Dulude, of the Association of Universities and Colleges, who

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appeared before the Standing Committee on Official Languages on March 26:

—bilingual competence is most effectively developed at the elementary and secondary levels and... universities should encourage prospective students to have acquired a working knowledge of their other official language;

That was the aim of the Accent program. The Reform Conservatives eliminated the Accent program. It is deplorable. Shame on them.

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Mr. Speaker, not to debate this, but I would be happy to table the late show question on which the member is rising. I can assure everyone that it has nothing to do with what he is speaking about.

That being said, I am happy to be able to talk about this government's record. I am really proud of our record of standing four-square behind the artists, standing four-square behind the cultural community in this country, in Quebec, in Ontario, in the west, in the Maritimes, everywhere. We put our money behind the promises that we made to Canadians and the promises we made in the last election.

What is really concerning is that when we put the money behind the arts, and that money is flowing equitably right across this country, the Bloc Québécois members voted against it. That is something they have to respond to. That is something they will have to explain in the next election, whenever that happens. They will have to explain to artists in Quebec why they voted against it, why they brought forward two economic plans and there was not a mention of the artists. That is what they will have to explain.

* * *

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Deputy Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed the following bill, to which the concurrence of the House is desired: Bill S-4, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (identify theft and related misconduct).

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to do a quick history in four minutes on how the Canadian government has been soft on crime against immigrants, soft on crime against migrants and soft on crime against nannies.

We need to regulate, educate and enforce. In the early 1980s there was an exclusive article by Victor Malarek in the *Globe and Mail* about how vulnerable people, new immigrants or people who were trying to become immigrants, were being ripped off. Nothing happened and the problem got worse.

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In 1995 the then Liberal government thought it was a real problem so it did a study and tabled the report, "Immigration Consultants: It is Time to Act", but action is what Canadians did not get. I am not surprised that the Liberal government did not get the job done. Between 1995 and 2002, nothing happened. There was no action whatsoever. Various immigration ministers made speeches and promises, but nothing got done. By October 2002 another minister established an advisory committee to talk some more. Then a year later, the Liberal minister at the time knew something had to be done because an election was getting close.

That minister set up a non-profit organization that has no power to regulate and no power to sanction consultants who are not members. It cannot seek judicial enforcement or have any disciplinary consequence. It is a complete paper tiger. It does not do anything. It sounds good. It is called the Canadian Society of Immigration Consultants, but it has no power whatsoever. Because its jurisdiction is not governed by statute, there is no possibility for a dissatisfied member and others to influence the internal functioning through a judicial review.

During committee hearings last year, we heard that the board of directors is not accountable to anyone. By the way, this is from the report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration on immigration consultants, tabled in the House in June 2008. The report said that the society lacks transparency, has no plan, the fees are too high, et cetera. It is unaccountable and it is not working at all.

Consultants can set up shop but nothing can happen to them because there are no regulations. What did we do? We did a study again and we tabled a report in the House. The report said that we had to do three things very quickly. One, we have to regulate by putting in legislation and setting up a non-share capital corporation, similar to a law society, a society of engineers or any other profession. Accountants have to belong to an association or a society. A person could be criminally charged for practising as a doctor or a lawyer, when the person is not.

However, immigration consultants do not need any qualifications. They can just set up shop. Some are unscrupulous. They can rip people off and nothing can happen to them.

The report said we should legislate. We should also make sure that we enforce. It said that there should be some procedures for complaints. We should change the immigration manual to make sure that people who need a consultant—

• (1825)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina has raised questions about what the government is doing to address the problem of immigrants being taken advantage of by unregulated immigration consultants. We certainly have that much in common. The difference is we have a government that takes this issue very seriously.

The hon. member's concerns follow up on recommendations of the standing committee's 2008 report concerning immigration consultants, which Citizenship and Immigration Canada is currently reviewing. The minister has noted that the government appreciates

both the member's concern and the recommendations of the committee.

As I have said, Citizenship and Immigration Canada is reviewing these issues and is continuing to work to protect vulnerable individuals from unscrupulous and predatory consultants. These policy options address prevention and enforcement tools regarding unscrupulous behaviour and the governance of consultants. We are going to act.

Our government is committed to protecting vulnerable immigrants from unscrupulous consultants. On March 23 the minister announced the launch of an advertising campaign to inform potential immigrants how to protect themselves against false claims from dishonest immigration consultants.

Our ads in the ethnic and mainstream media outlets direct people to the Citizenship and Immigration Canada website where they can learn how to find an authorized immigration consultant, lawyer or notary, if they choose to use one. The Citizenship and Immigration Canada site also contains links to websites where applicants and immigrants can go to take action if they believe they have been a victim of immigration fraud.

This campaign follows the recent launch of a multilingual warning video, which is now available on YouTube, the Citizenship and Immigration Canada website, through overseas missions, and on TV across the country through public service announcements.

The minister is also working with international partners on this issue. For example, during his visit to India in January 2009, the minister received assurances from Indian counterparts to step up efforts to combat unscrupulous immigration consultants in India. In addition to this, our government will take further action in Canada to improve regulation of immigration consultants to protect newcomers to our country.

The government wants immigration applicants to know how to protect themselves against fraud. It wants those seeking to represent these applicants to know that Canada will do everything it can to protect the integrity of our immigration system.

Therefore, the government is acting on the matter raised by the hon. member. We welcome her co-operation in the House and on the immigration committee to strengthen our immigration system and protect vulnerable newcomers and workers.

I know the member and I do not necessarily have a whole lot of things in common on the direction of immigration in this country. We do not necessarily share a lot of things in common, but we do share one thing and that is the treatment of vulnerable individuals who come to this country by choice, because they want to be here. Whether they come here under the temporary worker program, become a caregiver in a home, become a nanny, or work temporarily on a fruit farm, the fact is that under any of those categories, or applying to become a landed immigrant or permanent resident, there is some common ground.

I certainly want to thank the member for her efforts most recently on the immigration committee.

• (1830)

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, if I were a nanny or a live-in caregiver, giving me a flyer about immigration fraud would not be enough because I may still be ripped off and told to work in a home even though I may not have the right visa to do so. That could still happen.

One of the recommendations in the report was about enforcement. Whether it is Citizenship and Immigration Canada, the Canada Border Services Agency, the RCMP, CSIS, or the Canada Revenue Agency, we have to work with provincial partners to make sure we investigate and enforce. There must be sanctions. We must ensure that people will be punished if they are violating the Criminal Code or the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

I believe that investigation is important and enforcement must take place.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Mr. Speaker, I certainly have tried to make it clear to the member and she knows that the efforts made by the

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minister in terms of the direction that the department has been taking over the last number of months have been extremely positive. Also, we have dealt with this specific issue for numerous days and weeks at committee.

The member for Trinity—Spadina would have to acknowledge that not only have we dealt in great detail with the issue, but we have also ensured that we brought recommendations forward that actually have some teeth in them, that actually make sense, that have actually been carried at committee, that have been introduced in the House and are now in the hands of the minister and the department.

While this is a party that wants to work both here in the House and at committee, I would simply suggest to the member for Trinity—Spadina that she keep her chin up, make the effort and—

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:34 p.m.)

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